DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 447 EC 142 106


AUTHOR DeKay, Della; Lynch, Maureen

TITLE Enhancing Interpersonal Skills: A Workbook for Disabled College Students.

INSTITUTION City Univ. of New York, N.Y. Inst. for Research and Development in Occupational Education.


SPONS AGENCY New York State Education Dept., Albany. Office of Higher and Professional Education.
REPORT NO CASE-13-81
PUB DATE Sep 81
GRANT 53-81-0391; VEA-80-3C-162-HPS
NOTE 164p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *Disabilities; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Competence; Social Development



ABSTRACT

The guide is intended for counselors, teachers, and others as a curriculum in interpersonal skills for disabled college students. Chapters are designed to engage students in active participation in the following areas: active listening, expressing ideas, expressing feelings, handling questions, starting conversations, using feedback, asserting one's self, resolving conflicts, approaching job interviews, and handling work situations. Chapters provide suggestions for discussion, role playing, and case studies of other disabled persons. Many sections focus on the role of the interpersonal skills in employment. (CL)



**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED215447

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

# ENHANCING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS:

## A WORKBOOK FOR DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENTS

**Project Directors**

Bert Flugman
Leo Goldman
David Katz

**Project Writers**

Della DeKay
Maureen Lynch

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Institute for Research and Development in Occupational Education
Center for Advanced Study in Education
The Graduate School and University Center
of the City University of New York

IN COOPERATION WITH THE BUREAU OF GRANTS ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF HIGHER AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION
THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
CASE 13-81
SEPTEMBER, 1981
THE PROGRAM REPORTED ON HEREIN WAS PERFORMED UNDER
VEA GRANT NO. 80-3C-162 HPS AND 53-81-0391

EC142106

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| FOREWORD | i |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | ii |
| INTRODUCTION | |
| For Students | v |
| For Leaders | ix |
| CHAPTER ONE: | |
| Active Listening | 1 |
| CHAPTER TWO: | |
| Expressing Ideas | 21 |
| CHAPTER THREE: | |
| Expressing Your Feelings | 39 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: | |
| Handling Questions | 53 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: | |
| Starting Conversations | 65 |
| CHAPTER SIX: | |
| Using Feedback | 79 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN: | |
| Asserting Yourself | 97 |
| CHAPTER EIGHT: | |
| Resolving Conflicts | 113 |
| CHAPTER NINE: | |
| The Important Interviews | 125 |
| CHAPTER TEN: | |
| Handling Work Situations | 145 |

## Foreword

This guide is an important step in a task to which this Institute has been engaged for nearly ten years--enhancing the career development of people with disabilities. Along the way we created models and techniques for increasing the capabilities of institutions to open doors, and to facilitate people's movement through those doors and into the opportunities that lie beyond them. We have trained counselors and other institutional personnel, through both preservice and inservice programs, and we have published materials for those counselors to use in their work.

Now we have produced a document that is clearly targeted at activities disabled individuals themselves can undertake to influence their social interactions. We have recognized that disabled people need well-developed skills to deal with what is often a difficult environment. With this in mind we prepared this workbook to provide college counselors, teachers and others with a curriculum for, in effect, a course in interpersonal skills.

To the extent that this book will be a useful tool for students and their helpers, we and the funding agency--the Office of Higher and Professional Education of the New York State Education Department--will have contributed another step on the climb toward full involvement of handicapped people in the labor force and the community.

Lee Cohen, Director
Institute for Research and Development
in Occupational Education

## Acknowledgements

This deceptively simple looking workbook is actually the result of many, many people's efforts over a two year period. It began with our realization that an individual's success in a job often depends on that person's level of interpersonal skills. Being able to keep a job certainly requires specific vocational skills. But research indicates that job success is more often related to personal qualities such as the ability to communicate effectively with co-workers and supervisors. With this in mind we completed a first draft that was then reviewed and, in some instances, tried out on college campuses by the following:

Robert Durfey, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY
Patricia Evanoski, Queensborough Community College, CUNY
Barbara Finder, Nassau Community College
Fred Francis, New York State Education Department
Victor Margolis, Nassau Community College
Jeffrey Werden, Long Island University

Their comments helped keep us on target and we appreciate the time and care they took in reviewing our manuscript.

The second year of the project, we were fortunate to have the cooperation of three colleges as we field tested the book. We are very appreciative of the initial help provided by Dr. Victor Margolis, Coordinator of Disabled Student Services of Nassau Community College, Robert Nathanson, Coordinator of Special Education Services Program, Long Island University, and Dr. Natalie Rubinton, Director of Counseling, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY.

During the field testing the good humor and patience of the group leaders became apparent. They plowed through our manuscript with a diligence that left us wondering if we'd ever have time to incorporate all their ideas. Likewise the

students in the group were full of help and ideas. We appreciate more than we can say the fact that they made time in their demanding schedules to share their experiences and concerns. From "those research people" who sat silently in the back of the room taking notes: thank you.

The leader at Kingsborough Community College was Dr. Natalie Rubinton, Director of Counseling. Group members there were:

Maxine Adelman
Bryan Connor
Jose DelValle
Daniel DiMarco
Robert Gardner
Frank Gentile
Nikki Green
Gregory Hepburn
Hilda Martinez
Robert Parker
Tina Schwartzman
Melissa Sobol

At Long Island University the sessions were team led by Susan Cohen and Diane Murray. The group members there were:

Clara Bailon
Lois Borden
Willie Capers
Iris Jimenez
Valerie McDonald
Giancarlo Montemagni
Fred Pacheco
Jackie Taylor

Nassau Community College offered sessions led by both Janis Schmisky and Jeffrey Frankel. The group members:

Elizabeth J. Buchanan
Anthony DeLouise
Judy Fasman
Doris Finney
Patrick Gordon
JoAnn Madsgard
Randy Rowe
Maryann Ryan
Richard Tscherne

Some others who must be mentioned are those who each got a phone call with the request to talk about their experiences as a disabled individual. Every one of them had heard such requests more than they care to remember. And they also had more than their share of work piled up on their desks. But they each agreed to two meetings, and the interviews ended up as the section called "How They Did It." The people interviewed were:

Christopher Barlow, Centralized Laboratory Services
Michael Bohan, In-Touch Networks
Ira Brody, The Epilepsy Institute
Elizabeth J. Buchanan, Nassau Community College
Denise Figueroa, New York City Mayor's Office for the Handicapped
Jeffrey Frankel, Nassau Community College
Paul Hearne, Just One Break
Terry Moakley, Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association

It's questionable whether any project would ever leave our office without the assistance and good will of Melanie Bentley, the office manager. We especially appreciate her help in getting the chapters set in type. And, of course, we appreciate the continuing support and encouragement of Lee Cohen, director of IRDOE.

Finally, these two years of work were made possible by grants of VEA funds from the Office of Higher and Professional Education. We are especially grateful for the continuing support of our efforts as communicated particularly through two officials of that office; Mike Van Ryn, Chief of the Bureau of Grants Administration and Larry Gray, our project liaison.

## How to Use This Book

### To the Students Who Will Be Using It

It's no secret. That's what we want to tell you in this book. Do you have a friend who always seems to get a great summer job? Is there a certain professor you find yourself talking to and others you seem to avoid? Have you ever left a job interview wondering why you weren't able to say the things you wanted to? What do these questions have in common? The answer is a term that will probably sound familiar to you if you've taken a psychology course or participated in any group activities on campus: interpersonal skills.

In the following chapters we've covered some basic interpersonal skills we think are important and will help you. There are suggested activities at the end of each chapter that will give you a chance to practice the skills between sessions. Please use them, and watch your skills grow.

This doesn't mean that you have to turn into a robot who spends every waking moment carefully planning: "Now it is time to work on nonverbal attending, and then I should practice expressing emotions, and then . . . ." You'd get very bored with yourself, and so would the people around you. We're just trying to take some of the mystery out of communicating. That's why we say it's no secret. What we'd like you to do is practice the skills enough so that you can throw our book away and get on with your life.

But before you get to the point where you do throw this away, you'll probably find a strange thing happening. As you begin to work on your own interpersonal skills you'll find yourself watching others. And you'll most likely see that it's more

than luck that your friend has. Or how about the professors you never seem to be able to talk to? You'll see that some of them have pretty poor interpersonal skills. We don't recommend going up to a professor at college or a supervisor at work and saying, "Your interpersonal skills stink." But that private knowledge is better than sulking around thinking, "It's all my fault, I know they don't like me."

And that's really the whole point of this book. You can blame others when you don't get what you want. You can insist that everyone in the world has better luck than you. Or you can do yourself a favor and get to work. It's not easy, but the alternative of spending your life wondering what might have happened if you had only tried is not very appealing. We can't promise you that this book will get you the job of your dreams. But it's a good place to start.

Speaking of starting, you've probably just made another new beginning. If you just started college you know that you have entered a new world. You have new concerns, new responsibilities, and maybe even a new way of living if you've moved into a dorm on campus. Some people spend their college years counting the days till they're finished. Others enjoy being a college student and are sad when graduation comes. We're not going to waste your time with a bunch of "these are the best years of your life" phrases. That's for you to decide. But we are going to hit you with a phrase you've probably heard many times before. It starts with "Sooner than you think . . . ." You've probably heard it so often that you can finish the phrase yourself. But it's true. Sooner than you think you'll be finishing college and looking for a job.

We know that these are busy times when everyone seems to be making demands on you. If you aren't working you may be tempted to think this book isn't important for you now, that you'll learn these skills when you get a job. But if you

stick with us awhile you'll see that the skills we cover are just as important when talking to a professor as when dealing with a supervisor. If you're working now through a college internship or at a job you found yourself, your time is limited. But we think this book will help you with some of the concerns you may have right now.

The interpersonal skills we're dealing with here are essentially those needed to communicate well with people. You master each one by practice and then put them together into a conversation. The more you practice the better you'll be at it. Whether you're asking for a raise or clarifying an assignment, the better your communication skills are the better off you will be.

So now you know where we stand. We believe that these interpersonal skills are very important in all jobs. We also want to let you know that these skills can be learned. And though the skills are important for everyone, this book is aimed at students who have disabilities. You'll see that many of the exercises deal specifically with problems disabled people have. We believe that because of many people's insecurity and ignorance, the world a disabled person deals with is often a difficult one. And though we believe that working for change is important, this book is written about the world that exists now, the one we all live in on a day to day basis. We're not saying that you are solely responsible for smoothing over every difficult situation. But we do believe that this book can help you strengthen your abilities to deal better with some of the conflicts you'll face.

While we were writing this book we had the help of students from three colleges. They used the book and gave us their opinions. From the field testing we learned a couple of things we'd like to pass on to you. The group you'll be using

this book with is one of your best resources--you can learn from each other's experiences and comments. Another thing the students told us they enjoyed was the chance to not only practice interpersonal skills, but to do it while learning about the work world. But this also has a flip side. Sometimes the groups got so involved talking about their experiences in jobs, dealing with their disability, and trying to decide on a career that it became more of a rap session than a skills developing group. If you see this happening in your group you may want to make a rule that you first practice the skill of the chapter. And then you could talk about experiences and feelings. The last three sections of each chapter--Students Have Told Us, How They Did It, and The Idea Corner--are good sections for starting discussions.

## Suggestions for the Group Leader

We expect that this workbook will be used in different ways and in different settings. Therefore this introduction addresses many audiences: your role may be that of a counselor, a teacher, the coordinator for services to disabled students, or perhaps something else. Whatever your role or roles, there are probably some aspects of this skills training program that you are more familiar with than others. If you are a counselor, you may have had experience in using group techniques to help people grow. If a teacher, you probably have developed your own preferred teaching techniques. Or you might be a specialist in communication skills, in which case you are probably very familiar with the content covered in this book.

Rather than try to include in this introduction a detailed discussion of all the aspects of this kind of program--the counseling, teaching, and contents aspects--we offer some general suggestions that may be of help in using this particular book's approach and contents.

### 1. ACTIVE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Each chapter has been organized to engage the student's active involvement from beginning to end. After a very brief introduction to the chapter, we ask students to recall and role play experiences in their own lives, or to role play situations we present to them. The diversity of situations in each chapter should provide something for almost everybody, but you as leader of the group may find it useful to add your own role-plays, "homework" exercises and other activities that

are calculated to engage the interest and involvement of each particular group of students.

The most important point is that students are encouraged and stimulated to be active learners. This is not a lecture course, although both the guidebook itself and the leader of the group do offer explanations when needed. However, the students themselves have a wealth of content to offer from their life experience and to that extent are active participants, and even in some ways contributing teachers and resource people.

2. USE A-V AIDS

In the field tryouts, some of the best teachers brought to each class session various kinds of audio-visual aids that helped capture students' attention and helped make the content more vivid. Some prepared simple posters using photographs from magazines. Others brought in phonograph records of music that stimulated expressions of feelings or thoughts.

3. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

There is the story of the youngster going to his first violin lesson and not knowing the way from the subway station to Carnegie Hall, where his teacher had a studio. Seeing an adult carrying a violin, the youngster went over and asked "Can you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?" to which the answer was "Practice, my boy, practice."

That is a major commitment of this book. Knowledge is important, and understanding is valuable, but neither will produce skill without practice. Whether the skill is playing the violin, typing, or being assertive, practice is essential.

Therefore, we urge users of this workbook to provide as much practice as possible for all students in the group. Often this can be done effectively for even a large group by breaking up into pairs to practice a specified skill activity. Sometimes it is helpful to vary the format by breaking into trios, where the third person serves as an observer who gives the actors immediate feedback and who may also report to the total group specific things observed or interpreted.

One very useful model, drawn from the work of Allen Ivey with microcounseling, is the sequence: set up a situation in which a skill is called for, have each person role play or demonstrate doing a specified activity, give immediate feedback as to what the person was observed to do, offer suggestions for improvement, and then give the person an opportunity to try it again. For this model, closed-circuit television is an invaluable tool, since it permits several people to do their thing at the same time (provided there is a T.V. setup for each), and it permits the person and the "feedbacker" to review the scene together and point to specific actions that need improvement or that can be reinforced as effective ones.

4. MAINTAIN A GOOD PACE

How much of the material in each chapter should you try to include? Obviously this will depend on the total amount of time you have available with this group. We have developed the chapters with the general guideline that there would be an average of one-and-a-half hours of group time available for each. More than that would allow much more depth and more practice. Less than that means covering only a portion of the contents.

We probably can do no more here than the general suggestion: Keep things moving at a good clip in order to sustain interest, but don't try to cover any more

than can truly be absorbed and practiced. If you have only one hour of group time for a chapter, it would be preferable to cover only a portion of the chapter's contents in depth rather than to race through the entire chapter merely to cover it all.

5. HOME-SCHOOL-WORK

A major goal of this book is to help disabled students be as well prepared as possible to enter and be effective in the world of work. Since many students have had little or no work experience, the situations presented here build on the kinds of experiences they have had--at home, in school, and with friends--and then lead into work settings.

If the particular group you are working with happens to have had more work experience or are now working, by all means spend more time on job-related activities and skills.

6. VARIOUS DISABILITIES

We have tried to make this book meaningful and useful for people with different types of disability. In fact, the focus is on skills rather than disabilities. However, the very rationale for the book is that there are special needs that people with disabilities have in addition to all the usual needs shared with everybody else.

If you have had experience in working with disabled people, you've already learned such important communication techniques as verbalizing for a visually impaired person the nonverbal behavior that is going on, and permitting a hearing impaired person to watch the speaker's lips.

Beyond that, if you encourage them, students will let you know what their special needs are, and then you can make helpful accommodations both in the contents and the ways in which they are presented.

## 7. KNOWLEDGE-SKILLS-FEELINGS

The emphasis of this book is on skills. Some readers may think that we have neglected the feelings associated with the various topics included in the book. Our rationale is that the feelings are very likely to emerge and be discussed in a group without explicit guidance from the material, whereas skills are not so likely to be identified, defined, and specifically practiced without very special attention.

Of course, this will depend on the background of the group leader and the previous counseling experience of the students comprising the group. We are assuming that in most cases the leader will have a background in counseling, and the students will have had previous counseling either in groups or individually. Such groups should have little or no difficulty interweaving the feelings that are associated with the various topics.

In cases where the leader's background is primarily in teaching, there may be a tendency to neglect the feeling aspects. Perhaps such leaders would find it helpful to bring in a counselor as a co-leader or at least consult with a counselor regarding the feelings aspects.

In any case, it will be an individual matter as to how the feelings, knowledge, and skills components are interwoven during the course of any single session. Based on the field testing of this guidebook, we can offer two suggestions. First, be sensitive to the existence of feelings and encourage their expression, but keep the discussion within the bounds, both as to time and depth, or else the group will move toward becoming a counseling session. Second, be persistent in keeping group members' eyes on the major goal of these sessions: to increase each person's skills in interpersonal relations, so that each can attain a satisfying and effective career path.

8. THE FORMAT

Finally, all the chapters follow a format that is similar throughout. Listed here are the sections of the chapters and a brief description of each:

IN THIS CHAPTER: A brief statement introducing the skill covered in that chapter, the need for the skill, and its potential value to the student.

TO GET STARTED: Uses a familiar experience as a beginning point. It also acknowledges that the students have mastered situations that have given them competencies.

TRY THESE ACTIVITIES: A list of possible activities for you to choose from that gives both you and the group members an idea of their present skill levels. It also serves as motivation for the next section because students are asked to think how they would handle each type of situation.

TO IMPROVE: This is in effect a teaching section. It can be handled by silent reading, group reading, or asking a student to paraphrase it. We intended this instruction to be minimal; the group leader may do additional explaining or bring in other materials.

NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES: A second chance to role play and actually practice the skill. Most of the time should be spent on those activities which allow students to actively develop their skills.

DURING THE WEEK: This is the "homework assignment." We believe strongly that practicing their newly learned skill in real life settings is probably the most valuable single thing students can do. To gain maximum value from it, time should be spent at the beginning of each session to review the "homework" experience suggested at the end of the preceding session.

STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US: This is a section of quotes from students with whom the chapters were tried out. They tell about their experiences, insights, and

attitudes. We suggest discussion questions but you will, no doubt, think of many yourself.

HOW THEY DID IT: An interview with an employed disabled adult who candidly discusses concerns about work, family, and social situations. Here again there is valuable material to stimulate discussion.

THE IDEA CORNER: A resource section listing people, places, and books that may be of help to the students.

AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER: A brief closing statement that serves as a kind of wrap-up and stimulus to taking next steps.

IN CONCLUSION, this workbook has drawn upon the best current ideas, research findings and techniques that we have been able to collect. We hope that it will serve you well as a basic workbook for the groups of students you work with. As with any other curriculum, your increased familiarity and experience with its contents and the activities should make this book an increasingly valuable resource.

# CHAPTER ONE
# ACTIVE LISTENING

There's a game you might have played when you were little where you'd look at a picture in which something strange was happening. Like a scene that looked normal at first glance. Then you'd look closer and notice a pig in the background walking on its hind legs and pushing a baby carriage. But it was hard to catch because everyone else in the picture was walking along like nothing was wrong. And the question the book would ask is, "What's wrong here?" Have you ever been in a conversation where you had the same feeling? Not that the person you were talking to was a pig. But that something was very wrong. You weren't sure what it was but for some reason you just weren't connecting.

Chances are pretty good that the conversation would have gone better if the speaker and listener were tuned into each other. One way to tune in better is to sharpen your listening skills. Actually there are two types of listening--nonverbal and verbal; we'll be telling you about them in this chapter. You may never have taken the time to study just what makes a good listener different from a bad one. Yet you probably wouldn't have any trouble recognizing someone who is a good listener even if you couldn't spell out what skills were being used. But if you want to improve <u>your</u> listening skills you will need to spell them out clearly.

We'd like you to have some new listening skills by the end of this chapter. That's why it's important that you take the time to answer the questions and do the

exercises along the way. And we won't be playing Mystery Teacher. We'll tell you in each chapter what it is we'll be covering so that you can check yourself and see if you've learned those skills.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll be covering what nonverbal skills are, how to use noverbal skills to become a better listener, and recognizing other people's nonverbal language. We'll also introduce two techniques you can use to improve your listening: checking it out and acknowledging.

## PART I: LISTENING WITHOUT WORDS

### TO GET STARTED

This is a "What's wrong here?" situation. You're sitting in the hallway at school and can see someone you don't know out in the courtyard. Then a stranger comes along. You can't hear what the two people are saying but from watching them you get the feeling that one of them has something in particular to talk about. The other person seems in a hurry, seems not to want to listen. At first it seems the second person is going to leave, but then turns back and appears to disagree with something that was said.

Think about how you pictured the people when you read the above scene--how you saw them gesturing, and what their facial expressions were.

Have two volunteers from the group act out the courtyard situation without using words. Pay careful attention to body movements, facial expressions, and eye contact.

***On the board list all the nonverbal behaviors that you saw. For example, he crossed his arms in front of him, she raised her eyebrows, he moved his wheelchair back and forth. Then next to the behavior write what it meant: not interested, in a hurry, angry. Do all the members of your group agree? After all, the same movement can mean many different things. How do you decide what it means?

***If some group members pictured the scene differently have two people act it out as they imagined it.

***Take turns trying to express a feeling nonverbally. Here are some to get you started:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Excited | Busy | Relaxed |
| Worried | Bored | Doubtful |
| Proud | Angry | Surprised |

***Pair off; one person describe a vivid experience, then have the listener mirror back the nonverbal behavior that was observed.

In doing these exercises what did you learn about your nonverbal behaviors? Were you surprised by what your partner mirrored back?

Or perhaps you know very well what you do. You may have facial paralysis, uncontrollable movement of your hands, or an inability to maintain eye contact. If you've developed strategies for dealing with the nonverbal effects of your disability you might want to tell the group what they are.

**TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

***Try role playing a situation you have trouble with and get suggestions from the group. For instance, maybe the nonverbal effects of your disability cause no problems with your family and friends, but you aren't sure how to handle it on a job interview.

Back to the two people in the courtyard--did you assume they were two students? How would their nonverbal behavior be different if they were a professor and a student, or a librarian and a student aide? While you're on this, think about how the situation influences your actions, not only whom you're with but also where you are. In these activities, use as few words as possible and concentrate on the nonverbal behavior. Keep reminding yourself and the others in your group: don't tell me, show me. In other words, you can sit around and talk about the skills forever. But in order to learn them you have to practice them.

***Go back to the courtyard scene except this time have one person be a professor and one a student, without telling the group which they are. Have them carry on a conversation using only nonverbal behavior. Could you tell who was the student and who was the professor?

***Try it once again with a librarian and a student aide.

***Now try it with an employee and that person's supervisor at work. Would you use different nonverbal behavior at work than at other places? If so, how would it be different? Why would it be different?

**TO IMPROVE**

You can demonstrate your interest by where you focus your eyes. Some good things to do are:

Look directly at the speaker or listener

Focus on the other person's eyes

If you've ever found yourself in a situation where you've been so nervous you had to remind yourself to show some kind of facial expression, then you know the feeling behind the expression "scared stiff." Often we don't realize we're not responding. These are good suggestions to keep in mind:

Turn your head toward the speaker to show interest

Nod your head to show agreement

Shake your head to show disagreement

Smile when you agree

Wrinkle your forehead when you're angry or puzzled

Frown when you disagree

Raise your eyebrows when you don't understand

If you want to show you're interested, you should orient your entire body:

Sit or stand facing the other person

Lean slightly forward when the other person is speaking

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

***Go back to the people in the courtyard. This time when you act it out, use some of the techniques you just read about to try to improve it.

***Did you see any nonverbal behavior between the two people in the scene above that would have been inappropriate at work? At a party? In the library? At a football game? Try role playing an encounter in each of those settings.

***How would you show the following feelings among friends? Act out each of them. How would you show the same feelings at work? Role play those, too.

Excited
Worried
Proud
(Add your own) _____

_____

_____

## RATE YOURSELF

Think about your own behavior for a minute. How do you act when you talk to someone? How many of the following nonverbal behaviors do you use? Rate yourself from one to ten on this chart. Then fold the paper over so that your answers are covered and ask a friend to rate you.

| | Friend's Rating of Me | My Rating |
|---|---|---|
| Do you look at the person who is talking to you? | | |
| Do you focus on the other person's eyes? | | |
| Do you nod your head when you agree with a speaker? | | |
| Do you smile when you agree with a statement? | | |
| Do you frown when you disagree with a statement? | | |
| Do you lean forward when someone is speaking? | | |

If you and your friend don't agree, why do you think that is?

## PART 2: LISTENING WITH WORDS

### TO GET STARTED

Have you ever complained to a friend about someone not really listening to you? Or maybe someone said it about you--that you may have been sitting with someone but your thoughts were miles away. And everyone has probably had the experience of being called on in class and having no idea what the question was.

There are a lot of different reasons why this happens. Those times when you really want to listen but end up feeling like a little kid facing a "What's wrong here?" puzzle it can be very frustrating. Many times we are so busy thinking about what we are going to say, or trying to unravel a person's past comment that we completely miss what's being said. Here's an example; choose two people to act it out.

The first class has ended and as the other students leave, Robert stays in his seat and slowly closes his notebook. He is thinking that the professor didn't seem as bad as she's supposed to be. Some friends have told him to watch out for her. One of them, Tony, even dropped the course because she refused to let him tape-record the classes. Robert is tempted to leave with the other students. But he knows he should tell her that, because he has a learning disability, he'll need some accommodations to be made on the tests. After all, this is a required course, he reminds himself as he walks up to her desk; I have to have this course to graduate.

Robert: Professor Wilson, do you have a few minutes?

Professor: Of course.

Robert: I thought I should tell you . . . I have a learning disability. That means I take my tests at the Office for Disabled Students. There's nothing else really, I don't have to tape-record or anything. (Thinks: Oh, that was stupid, now she's going to think I know about Tony.)

Professor: I don't understand, is there something wrong with your vision? (Thinks: I'm an economics professor not a social worker. I don't know how to handle this.)

Robert: I've taken the introductory course in the department so I'm prepared for this class. (Thinks: No wonder Tony dropped the class. Well, I'm not going to let her intimidate me.)

Professor: (Thinks: Who wouldn't do better with someone to help you take a test! How do I know what he's saying is true? It just seems like a fad to me; first everyone said they were a hippie, now everyone says they're handicapped.) I don't think that's fair to the other students, Robert. You can't take your tests home to do them.

Robert: (Thinks: What a #*% ! She thinks I'm lying, next thing I know she's going to tell me to bring a note from my mother.) It's standard policy, Professor Wilson. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that. . .

Professor: I really don't have time to get into this now. You should be in a different class if you're going to have problems in here.

Do you think Robert and Professor Wilson were listening very well to each other?

What do you think about the way Robert handled this brief interview? In particular, did he listen well enough to what Professor Wilson was saying?

How about Professor Wilson? At what points was she listening well to Robert? At what points could she have listened better?

**TO IMPROVE**

There are two techniques you can use to dig yourself out of a conversation like that. Of course, some situations require more than being a good listener. But whatever you end up doing, listening is always the first step.

One technique you can use is called checking it out. Before you can know whether you agree or disagree you need a clear picture of what the other person said. One way of getting this is saying to them what you thought you heard: "You think that _____. Is that right?" It's also very helpful because it makes the speaker get focused.

What are some of the expressions you can use when checking it out? Two are listed below; write three more.

"You think that _____. Is that right?"

"What I heard you say is _____. Is that correct?"

_____

_____

_____

When you have already checked it out and it's clear that you disagree, a second technique you can use is acknowledging. It lets the other person know that you have been listening but now you want to voice your opinion or feeling. One way of doing this is by saying, "I know you believe _____, but I think that _____."

What are some other expressions you can use to acknowledge what the other person said? Write three more below.

"I know you believe _____, but I think _____."

"You want to _____. But what I'd like is _____."

_____

_____

_____

## NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

***Select a topic about which people have different opinions. Start with someone who is willing to volunteer an opinion, then the next person says to the group, "Pat says that. . ." Continue around the group with everyone repeating the neighbor's comment before giving their own opinion. What are you practicing?

***Break into pairs and try to use the two techniques we described above to resolve the conversation between Robert and the Professor. Let the group know what you came up with.

***Have two more volunteers improvise a conversation between friends where neither one is listening. Now do it using "checking it out" and "acknowledging." If you have time try two other people and role play other situations, such as an employee and supervisor. With all of them start out by purposely not listening to each other, then do a second improved version.

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Watch one of your favorite TV programs. But this time turn the sound off. As you watch the nonverbal behavior, jot down some notes so you can talk about it at the next session.

2. Observe a conversation. Try to tune out the voices. As you pay special attention to the nonverbal behavior, compare the way different people use their faces, hands, and bodies when speaking. In particular see if you can identify nonverbal behavior that goes with specific feelings.

3. If you have become aware of some nonverbal behavior of yours that you would like to change in some way, try out the new way in a conversation with someone. Does the other person respond differently? If you can, ask that other person for feedback.

4. You may find it uncomfortable to use "checking it out" and "acknowledging." If they were new to you, it may have felt very artificial. Or maybe you already use them but don't realize that you do. Do you consider yourself a good listener? How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10? During the week ask two people to rate you. How does your rating compare with theirs? Why do you think that is?

5. Listen to a TV show (soap operas are great for this!) or a conversation somewhere around campus. Write down a section of a dialogue where they were using very poor listening skills--a half-page is enough. Now rewrite it using checking it out and listening. Or if you are watching with someone else, act it out yourself, using these two techniques.

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

During the field tryouts of this book, students often told about their own experiences and ideas. Some of these statements may suggest things you'd want to try yourself. Or you may disagree with some of these ideas; if so, discuss them in your group if time permits.

o When I'm nervous and have trouble maintaining eye contact one thing that helps is to focus somewhere else on the person's face--their nose or forehead. Sometimes I eventually relax and can look at their eyes.

o When I read the chapter I realized my limitation (facial paralysis) must be very confusing for people when I first meet them. I'm not able to give any kind of nonverbal response with my face. So recently I started making an effort to compensate by responding verbally to show what I'm thinking. I try to use little phrases like, "that's interesting," "I doubt it," or "I know what you mean."

o I don't have any definite rules about whether I discuss my disability. You can usually get a feel for the other person. Some people have been awfully sheltered and it really bothers them when they meet someone who has a disability. Then it's usually easier if I explain what my disability is and how it affects me. I don't think I owe everyone my whole life story though.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Through this session have you learned new things about others' disabilities and how their lives are influenced? In one group a blind student asked someone sitting next to him (who had cerebral palsy) to describe what an impatient expression looked like. She said she had never thought of it. But she described the look to him. She was glad he asked her because she had always thought about her own speech difficulty and gave very little thought to others' disabilities. She said too often everyone gets into their little camps--the deaf vs. paraplegics vs. blind--and we start competing with each other for programs and funds. What do you think about that?

2. How do you decide when to discuss your disability?

## HOW THEY DID IT

We end each chapter with an interview with a disabled person that was specially done for this book. Each interview portrays something about how that person faced up to problems or barriers and managed to cope successfully. We hope that you will benefit from some of their experiences and gain some useful ideas, a sense of sharing with other people, and increased confidence in facing the future.

### DENISE FIGUEROA

### The Career Development of an Activist

Denise Figueroa made it clear from the beginning that she didn't want to be interviewed if she was going to be held up as, what she called, a "super crip." She believes that having unrealistically successful role models forced on you is just as bad as being constantly told you aren't capable.

But she did agree to talk about her experiences at Brooklyn College as a student activist, as well as the choices she made that led to her present job. She is the 504 coordinator for the New York City Mayor's Office for the Handicapped.

"My freshman year somebody I knew from high school said there was going to be a meeting of a new organization of disabled students called So Fed Up. I went. And because there were few people I was given a committee to organize. It surprised me. But I guess I was ready for it. I had been very shy in high school, a real wallflower, I wouldn't even raise my hand in class. But this wasn't like high school where the bus picked you up at 3:30 and that was it. I started to get involved in all sorts of organizations.

"I didn't ease in, I really plunged in. My first involvement was a sit-in at the hotel where Nixon had his headquarters. He had just vetoed the rehabilitation act.

So we got a group together and staged a sit-in until midnight. We didn't get arrested, but my family was shocked. They were used to always having me at home--there are five girls in my family and I was the one always home. I think they saw it as a sort of betrayal. I was going out, doing things with friends... really for the first time. I packed an awful lot of growing up into that one year. I had always been pretty mature for my age. Maybe because I had to make decisions at a young age about whether or not to have an operation, whether to go with the crutches and braces or use a wheelchair. But this was different. I started joining all sorts of organizations."

Denise, who is now twenty-six, joined more than student organizations while she was in college. She became active in many community groups because she feels strongly that it's important not to get isolated on campus. And she went to Washington for a meeting of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. But she soon found she had made too many commitments. And in order to make it to all the meetings she often skipped classes and missed assignments.

"My grades were pretty bad," she admitted. She had to find a balance between the groups she believed in and the classes she needed. She decided to go to summer school, and was able to bring her average up. She also switched majors. "I started out wanting to be an accountant because I was told with that I'd have financial security." But once she saw what the profession really involved she decided it wasn't right for her. She changed to psychology with a minor in sociology.

A second important decision came at the end of her freshman year when her parents decided to move to Connecticut and assumed she'd go with them. "I had never been on my own before," she said. "But I told them I was staying." After finding an apartment she could share with a classmate she got busy trying to scrape

together the money she'd need. Eventually she did come up with enough, from many different places--a loan from school, SSI checks, OVR funds, and borrowing from a friend.

In her job at The Mayor's Office she feels she is using many of the skills that she first developed in student organizations. Her involvement also brought her in contact with many professionals who agreed to write references for her when she started looking for a job. And though she enjoys peer counseling, she says that she always knew she wanted to work in administration rather than as a counselor. "I want to shape programs. And so I decided I'd have to be in a position to influence policy."

Suggested Discussion Questions

Each of the interviews will interest you in different ways because of your unique experiences and concerns. You don't have to use the suggested questions below. But here are a few to get you started.

1. Was going from college to high school as big a change for you as it was for Denise? If so, in what ways? Do you think college is more important for students who are disabled?

2. Do you think Denise had any problems when she decided to change her major? What kinds of problems can you imagine?

3. What do you think of the importance that Denise put on joining clubs? Do you think any useful skills can be gained from being active in organizations?

**THE IDEA CORNER**

In this section of each chapter we bring together ideas and information that may be useful resources for you.

Most colleges have videotape equipment that students can use. If you make an appointment to use it, you may be surprised at what you see. Many graduate schools that train psychologists, business executives, and other professionals use videotaping. Going with a friend is a good idea. Pick something you're interested in to focus on so you won't keep thinking, "That's how my hair looks?" and "I didn't

know I did that with my hands." Then watch it again trying to focus on your active listening skills. You may want to make up your own assignment by preparing a chart listing what you do now, what you want to do, and what kinds of things you should practice to reach your goal.

Here's a chart from the Sperry Corporation. Check the habits that sound the most like yours, then add them up to see if you have more good listening habits or more bad listening habits.

**10 keys to effective listening**

These keys are a positive guideline to better listening. In fact, they're at the heart of developing better listening habits that could last a lifetime.

| 10 Keys to Effective Listening | The Bad Listener | The Good Listener |
|---|---|---|
| **1.** Find areas of interest | Tunes out dry subjects | Opportunitizes; asks "what's in it for me?" |
| **2.** Judge content, not delivery | Tunes out if delivery is poor | Judges content, skips over delivery errors |
| **3.** Hold your fire | Tends to enter into argument | Doesn't judge until comprehension complete |
| **4.** Listen for ideas | Listens for facts | Listens for central themes |
| **5.** Be flexible | Takes intensive notes using only one system | Takes fewer notes. Uses 4–5 different systems, depending on speaker |
| **6.** Work at listening | Shows no energy output. Fakes attention. | Works hard, exhibits active body state |
| **7.** Resist distractions | Is easily distracted | Fights or avoids distractions, tolerates bad habits, knows how to concentrate |
| **8.** Exercise your mind | Resists difficult expository material; seeks light, recreational material | Uses heavier material as exercise for the mind |
| **9.** Keep your mind open | Reacts to emotional words | Interprets color words; does not get hung up on them |
| **10.** Capitalize on fact *thought* is faster than *speech* | Tends to daydream with slow speakers | Challenges, anticipates, mentally summarizes, weighs the evidence, listens between the lines to tone of voice |

How much do you know about 503 and 504? Here's some information from a 1980 brochure put out by the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. Because changes are being made you may notice some information that isn't up to date. For the most recent information you can use this toll free number to call the New York State Advocates for the Disabled: 1 800 522-4369.

## AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR THE DISABLED: THREE PROGRAMS
A Pocketguide by PCEH

There are three programs covering the employment of handicapped people. They cover thousands of employers in the USA.

SECTION 503

Every employer doing business with the Federal Government under a contract for more than $2500 must take "affirmative action" to hire handicapped people. Contracts may be for the procurement of supplies or services, or for the use of real or personal property.

"Affirmative action" covers more than hiring. It also covers job assignments, promotions, training, transfers, working conditions, terminations, etc. Half of all the businesses in America--some 3,000,000--are covered.

SECTION 504

Every institution in the USA getting Federal financial assistance must take steps to assure that handicapped people are not discriminated against in employment.

Included are schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, social service agencies, and many more kinds of institutions and establishments.

Section 503 calls for "affirmative action." Section 504 calls for "non-discrimination." In practicality, there's little difference in how they affect you in employment.

VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT

Every employer with a Federal Government contract of $10,000 or more must take "affirmative action" to hire disabled veterans of all wars, and all veterans of the Vietnam Era. Here, too, "affirmative action" applies not just to hiring, but to all other personnel actions as well.

Who's Handicapped? (Sections 503 and 504)

A handicapped person is anyone who: (1) Has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of his major life activities. (2) Has a record of such an impairment. (3) Is regarded as having such an impairment.

"Substantially limits . . ." This has to do with the degree of disability. A handicapped person having a hard time getting a job or getting ahead on the job because of a disability would be considered "substantially limited."

"Major life activities . . ." These include communication, ambulation, self-care, socialization, education, transportation and, of course, employment. The main emphasis is on activities that in some way affect employment.

Who's Handicapped? (Veterans Act)

A disabled veteran is a person who has a 30 percent or more disability rating from the Veterans Administration, or who was discharged or released from active duty for a service-connected disability.

A Crucial Word: "Qualified"

Not every handicapped person is eligible for these three programs. There is a crucial word: "qualified." A person must be capable of performing a particular job --with reasonable accommodation to the handicapping condition, if it's needed. All of which brings up two more crucial words:

"Reasonable Accommodation"

"Reasonable accommodation" means making necessary adaptations to enable

a qualified handicapped person to work. It may include: (1) Making facilities used by all employees accessible to handicapped people (ramps, restroom adaptations, wider aisles, etc.) (2) Making modifications in jobs, work schedules, equipment or work area (simplifying a job so a retarded person can fill it; changing working hours so a paraplegic person doesn't have to fight traffic, teaching sign language to a supervisor of a deaf worker; providing a reader for a blind person).

One of the best authorities on "reasonable accommodation" is the handicapped person. This means you; don't hesitate to make suggestions.

Identification

Some handicapping conditions are perfectly obvious; no question about them. But others are hidden--a person with epilepsy whose seizures are under control; a person who has been treated for mental illness; a person with diabetes; someone with a heart condition. The question is: should they identify their conditions, or not, when they apply for work?

If you want the protections and opportunities of Sections 503 and 504, you will need to be identified as handicapped, to be eligible.

Remember that: (1) The information does not have to be provided; it's up to you. (2) It will be kept confidential. (3) Refusal to give it will not subject a person to adverse treatment. There is one circumstance where identification may be required under Section 504. That's when an employer is voluntarily undertaking to increase the number of handicapped persons he employs. If information about a handicap is given, confidentiality will be respected, with these necessary exceptions: (1) Supervisors and managers may be informed about any work restrictions or accommodations needed by the person. (2) First aid people will be informed about possible emergency treatment.

Pre-employment Exams

Under Section 503, the employer may require a pre-employment medical

exam. But the results are to be used only to determine suitable placement of a person in a proper job.

Under Section 504, the employer does not have the right to give a pre-employment medical exam, or to ask whether a person has a handicap. But the employer does have the right to ask whether the person can perform tasks related to the job. Example: A person with epilepsy cannot be asked about his condition. But if driving is a part of the job, he may be asked if he holds a driver's license.

A medical exam may be given under Section 504 after an offer of employment has been made. If this exam reveals a disqualifying condition, the offer may be withdrawn.

What Employers Have To Do

Handicapped people ought to have a clear picture of what employers are required to do under affirmative action programs. Here are highlights:

- They must look over any physical or mental job requirements to see whether they happen to screen out handicapped people on the basis of their disabilities. If they do, these requirements have to be eliminated or modified unless they are clearly job-related and consistent with business necessity and safe performance.
- If medical exams are given before hiring, they may not be used to exclude or limit handicapped people.
- "Reasonable accommodation" must be made, unless the employer can show it would create an undue hardship on his business.
- Outreach efforts are to be made to reach handicapped people. Examples: recruiting through State employment services and State vocational rehabilitation offices; through organizations of, and for, handicapped people; through schools for handicapped students.
- The firm's affirmative action program should be publicized widely throughout the company.
- An executive of the company should be named director of affirmative action. He should have the backing of top management.

Not all these things apply to all companies. They are indicative of the kinds of steps employers must take to assure full opportunities for handicapped people.

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter we have tried to help you increase your sensitivity to the complex process of listening. We emphasized both verbal and nonverbal methods of listening. Perhaps your group came up with some new insights as a result of your work with this chapter. For instance, in one group, a blind student asked the person sitting next to him (who had cerebral palsy) to describe what an impatient expression looks like. Neither one had ever thought of that particular question, and it was mind-stretching for both. What new insights did anyone in your group come up with?

# CHAPTER TWO
# EXPRESSING IDEAS

When someone gets an idea in a comic strip it's often pictured as a lightbulb going on overhead. Often with a new idea we imagine how exciting it will be to share it. How easy if all we had to do was open our mouth and our idea would shine out brilliantly like a 100 watt light bulb. But sometimes the reality of getting that brilliant idea out of your mind, into your mouth, and across to people ends up being more like spitting out broken glass.

IN THIS CHAPTER we're going to practice expressing ideas. We'll talk about the different kinds of ideas, and also about ways to help you better express them. We'll cover three types of ideas messages, why people are reluctant to express their ideas, how to communicate your ideas, and ways to disagree.

## TO GET STARTED

Imagine that you are at a family gathering. And everyone is in great spirits. But you can't seem to forget something that happened at school. Yesterday when you were registering for your last semester of classes you were told that one of the classes you wanted has a prerequisite. If that's true you won't be able to graduate. There's no way to find out until Monday, but you can't seem to put it aside. Your brother comes up to you and asks what's wrong. You try to explain it to him but find that he doesn't understand. He has never gone to college and isn't familiar with the terms you use like prerequisite or distribution requirement. After you explain what the terms mean you still can't get him to understand. Before he leaves he says that maybe you should drop out and get a job where he works.

***Have two people act out the scene. Have the two volunteers try to confuse each other--be on different wave lengths--as much as possible.

***After they're done use the blackboard to write down the unclear phases. Next to the phrases write what made them so confusing to the listener--jargon, too many ideas at once, or whatever the reason was. What other things can make an idea unclear?

***Ask for two more volunteers to repeat the scene using suggestions from the group, and trying to make the conversation as clear as possible. In what specific ways did they improve over the earlier scene?

Have you ever been in a situation where someone agreed with you but you knew they didn't understand? What did you do? If it happened now would you handle it differently?

***Break into pairs and have one person tell the other an important past experience and then give an opinion about the experience. Now have the listener give feedback: Was it clear enough? What part wasn't clear? What suggestions for improvement?

***Listen to a popular song that someone has brought in. You may want to listen to it a couple of times, each time listening for different things. For instance, the first time you can identify important details like who the singer is, if the singer is male or female, what the

background instruments are. Everyone should agree on these details since they're facts. Then you can move on to opinion messages: what you think of the singer, the main point of the song, etc. You may be surprised to see that people who have the same experience (listening to the record) could have such different opinions about the experience.

Have you ever held yourself back, not expressed an idea? Sometimes our feeling is right--it would be better to wait and bring the idea up later. But other times we lose a good opportunity. Usually when we hold back it's because we think our idea is unimportant or that the other person will be angry or uninterested. Have you ever been reluctant to share your opinions or experience because of some of these reasons? Do you have some idea as to why you felt as you did?

Thinking about your own experiences, do you feel that people will dislike you if they disagree with your opinion? Do you think your bosses and co-workers have to like you in order for you to do well on your job?

***Find a partner who will pretend to be an OVR counselor. You have decided to change majors and have to tell your counselor that. It's important to express your ideas as clearly as possible. Afterwards tell the group how you think it went. Two people may want to show the group how they did it. There are many different things you could discuss afterwards. For instance, the "client" could write down the points s/he was making, and have the "counselor" write down the points s/he heard being made, then compare what was said to what was heard. What kinds of differences are there? Why do you think that is? What could be done to make the messages clear?

The following chart may help you to better recognize the way you share ideas with different people in your life. Fill in all the information called for and then look at the question that follows. In selecting the specific idea for numbers 1,2, and 3 (the experience, opinion, and fact) you may find it especially valuable to select situations that relate in some way to your disability.

Check to indicate which of these people you'd share each idea with.

| | Friend | Teacher | Employer |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. An experience--you might describe something that happened this week (summarize it briefly here) | | | |
| 2. Your opinion on a matter that you're concerned about (summarize it briefly here) | | | |
| 3. A fact about a certain topic that you happen to be informed about (summarize it briefly here) | | | |

Were you surprised at how your chart looked when it was filled in? Could you do more sharing of your ideas with those people with whom you usually don't? How would you start?

**TO IMPROVE**

It is important to recognize that there are different kinds of idea messages. Often we have difficulties in a conversation because we aren't really clear what kind of message is being expressed. We're going to cover three kinds of messages: those that tell about an experience, those that express an opinion, and those that state a fact.

Experience messages are used to describe specific events in your life. It may be as simple as something that happened in the morning when you were getting ready for school. Or it may be something more important to you like the meeting of a group on campus that you are very active in. Or a movie that you saw and want to describe to a friend. Whatever it is, when you take the time to tell about something you are saying that these experiences are important to you and that you want to share them.

An opinion is a statement of your personal attitudes or judgments. Because these judgments are based on personal experiences and beliefs, people frequently disagree with each other. This does not mean, however, that one person is right and the other is wrong. Rather, their disagreement shows that they may have different experiences or hold different values or beliefs.

For example, you may believe that college is important if you are going to get the kind of job you want. But some of your family may disagree. To them it may seem like a waste of time. . . an expensive waste of time. You may never agree no matter how much talking you do since this is an opinion message. In your opinion college will help you get the kind of job you want; in their opinion it isn't necessary.

In expressing opinions it helps if you make it explicit that you are expressing an opinion and you are interested in hearing the other person's opinion on the subject.

A fact is unlike an opinion because it can be proven true or false. If your family wanted to check and see if you are really enrolled in college they could check by asking the registrar.

Each person develops a reputation for accuracy in reporting facts based on that person's record. What do you think is your reputation? Why is that? Are there ways you could improve it?

Sometimes knowing the difference between a fact, an opinion, and an experience can make things clearer in your own mind. But when it comes time to express an idea you're not going to clear your throat and say, "I am now going to express an opinion, not to be confused with an experience or a fact." At such times what you need are specific techniques to help you best express your ideas. And wouldn't you know it, we just happen to have a few such techniques up our sleeves.

Techniques for Best Expressing Your Ideas

Prepare what you are going to say. There are times when it's good to be spontaneous and off-the-cuff, but if it's important to communicate a particular idea clearly, you may do better to decide first what you want to say, organize your thoughts in a logical sequence, and even jot down some outline notes.

Avoid jargon words. They may help to develop a clubby feeling within your specialty group, but they may be confusing to others and turn them off from further listening.

Send one idea at a time. Resist the temptation to pour forth everything you know or think in one mouthful.

Use precise words. Don't necessarily settle for the first word that comes to mind. Ask yourself whether it's the best word to express that particular thought.

Include specific examples. Generalizations are often valuable, but they will come across more clearly to people if you give very concrete illustrations.

## How to Disagree

Earlier in this chapter we talked about people not expressing their ideas because they were afraid someone would disagree. Expressions have developed to describe that feeling like "don't rock the boat," and "take the path of least resistance." These expressions make it sound more like you're out in the jungle battling nature instead of just talking to another human being and trying to get your idea across. You may have been in a conversation where you felt like you would have had better luck wrestling a gorilla.

Obviously you don't want to go around disagreeing just to prove you're tough. But the other extreme is just as bad--always pretending to agree. There are certain times when it's appropriate to disagree. And learning to negotiate is a very important skill to use not only at work but also at school and in your personal life.

There are four things to consider when there is a disagreement of opinion. Sometimes you can come to an agreement by going past the opinion to the underlying facts, assumptions, values and reasoning. Other times the closest you can come to agreeing is to agree to disagree. In either case, try asking the following questions; they may help you get to the heart of the disagreement.

## Four Things to Consider

1. Are we using the same facts? Are our numbers the same? Dates? Places? People? You might be starting from completely different points. So it helps if you will each explain what you believe are the facts and where you got your information.

2. Are we starting with the same assumptions?

3. Do we have the same values? In forming an opinion people are influenced by the kinds of values they have. If you can both tell a little bit about what you hold as important you may be able to see how it is that you have different opinions.

4. Are there mistakes made in reasoning? When you take an opinion apart by asking the questions above you can sometimes pinpoint an error made in reasoning. If you or the other person sees that it's a good time to begin to reevaluate your opinions, then you will have made real progress.

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

***Write the five techniques on the board. Give examples of when you have used each of them in your own experiences.

*** Find a partner to tell about something that happened to you. Try to keep in mind the different techniques. Make it a point to use all of them. When you're done, your partner will tell you things that weren't clear. Now let your partner tell you a story, and then you give the feedback about what wasn't clear.

***Have two volunteers improvise this scene. You have to tell a supervisor at your new summer job that you have to change your hours because of a course you're required to take. Divide the rest of the group into four sub-groups, with each responsible for making a note of a different technique.

***In deciding on a career there are many people you'll encounter--your advisor, OVR counselor, personnel officer. Along the way you'll be describing your interests and career goals. It's hard to convince someone else when you're not sure yourself. Here's a questionnaire that may help you decide.

Where do you stand on your career goal? Check one statement which describes you best:

____ a) I have only one occupation in mind, and I am ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN it is the one I want.

____ b) I have only one occupation in mind, and I have MORE or LESS DECIDED it is the one I want.

____ c) I am UNDECIDED among two or three occupations which interest me.

____ d) I have NO IDEA of what occupation I want.

What is your ideal occupational goal?

What do you think your actual occupation will be five years from now?

***If you have time you can practice expressing ideas by explaining what things are important to you in choosing your occupation. You may want to put a time limit on it, like give your answer in three minutes. What things were important to you in deciding--security, freedom, prestige, income, or other things?

***State in your own words the four questions to ask when you're disagreeing with someone. After writing them on the board, give examples of how you would use them. For instance, what kinds of things could you say to someone to check and see if you have the same facts?

***As a group make a list on the chalkboard of controversial statements. Find a partner. From the list of topics pick one about which you and your partner disagree. Try to apply all of the techniques discussed above. You may end by agreeing to disagree.

***Describe a situation in which you disagreed with someone.

--Tell how you expressed your disagreement.
--Point out evidence that the other person didn't consider, mistakes in their reasoning.
--How did you feel when you disagreed with the other person? You may want to role-play with someone in the group a different way to handle that situation.

***Find a partner for this. Using what we've talked about in this chapter, practice telling an OVR or college counselor that you've decided to change your major. After you've finished, your partner (who was playing the counselor) will tell you how you sounded. Then you play the counselor so your partner can practice.

***Describe a situation in which you were reluctant to discuss your opinions or experiences.

--Why do you think you were reluctant?
--Explain how you could have improved the situation.

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Make a point of discussing your opinion or experiences during the week in a situation where you were initially reluctant. Be ready to tell at the next session:

   --how the other person responded
   --whether you expected the person to respond this way
   --how you felt during the discussion
   --whether you expected to feel that way

2. Watch for three situations in which you send idea messages during the week. Be ready to tell the group at the next session:

   --the idea you sent
   --to whom you sent it
   --the verbal portrayal that you think you sent
   --specific comments that the listener made which demonstrate that your message was received.

3. Find someone whose major is very different from yours. Talk about that person's department, and make notes about the jargon that was used.

4. If you are about to graduate you may want to move a step further and make a list of jargon words used in your field. There's nothing wrong with using them--they're a shortcut way of talking. But sometimes we get so used to them that we forget not everyone knows what they mean.

5. What are the jargon words used in employment ads? If you're in the process of going on job interviews this would be a good thing to focus on. Bring in some ads with the jargon defined. Your group can help with the ones you're stuck on. There are really two types of jargon in employment ads--those terms unique to various professions like "cobol," and "CRC"; and those used in employment ads like "salary commensurate with experience." Why do you think jargon is used in ads? Have you ever heard the expression "buzz word"?

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

- Even my own mother doesn't understand my speech sometimes. When I'm trying to express my ideas and someone doesn't understand, I want them to stop me. There have been times when I know I'm not being understood--the person's nodding their head like crazy and smiling. And I know if I said, "Now I'm going to go jump out the window," they'd just say, "Uh huh, good idea." The first week of college someone asked me if I was drunk because of the way I talked. Now I say something in the beginning like, "Tell me if you don't understand anything and I'll repeat it."

- When I was in high school a friend of mine warned me about the OVR counselor she had just seen. He was the same person I was assigned to. So I knew I'd have to really be ready for him. I thought about what I wanted to say and practiced. I knew where I wanted to go to college and I had ideas about what to major in. I didn't want some counselor telling me what I could or couldn't do. But I knew I'd have to convince him. I didn't go in with a chip on my shoulder but I did go in ready to assert myself. The thing is that in having to get ready for the meeting with him, I was forced to be clearer in my own mind about what I wanted.

- Sometimes I really feel pressured to decide on a career. And the feeling I get, that this is it--what you do now will make or break you--is unfair. I don't think it's true, I've seen people switch jobs. But it is harder for disabled people to change jobs. I do believe that.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Does the fact that you have a disability influence how you express your ideas? If so, how?

2. Have you decided on a job you'd like? How did you make the decision? If you are not sure, what kinds of things could you do to decide?

**HOW THEY DID IT**

## PAUL HEARNE

### Sell Your Skill, Not Your Disability

Paul Hearne is the director of Just One Break, a job placement agency for the disabled in New York City. He is so full of stories and opinions that talking to him is more like getting on a plane with a veteran pilot. Watching him, you soon decide that you're in good hands and you can just sit back and enjoy the ride.

"When I was eight years old I knew I wanted be be a lawyer," Paul said. "Maybe it was from watching Perry Mason, I don't really know. But I was sure." Paul came to J.O.B. two years ago after working for four years in legal services and setting up the first legal aid program for disabled clients. He has also written two books on the legal rights of the disabled. He seems impatient talking about the past, and is much more interested in describing his ideas for the future or talking about the training workshops he gives for corporations.

But he did talk a little about his decision to go to law school. "I knew right from the start I wanted to do poverty law, some kind of community legal service. I should have taken a break but I didn't. I can't complain, I didn't get thrown out, but I was exhausted. I was lucky. I didn't know at that age that being disabled I had to have something extra going for me. I was a kid like everyone else. I started caring my junior year when I knew I had to get it together for law school. Before that I went to school like every other student in the 60's. I played and cut classes. I ran the student senate, had a night job, carried eighteen credits, and slept only about four hours a night."

His junior year his father died suddenly of a heart attack. That year Paul decided to leave home for the first time and moved into a dorm at Hofstra University where he was a political science major. After graduating in 1971 he

worked for six weeks as a counselor at Human Resources Center before hitching through Europe for the rest of the summer. His family was concerned about him traveling alone. "They acted like I was going to Vietnam instead of on vacation."

"I'm sure there were times after that when my family shook their head and thought I was a real wacko. But I have to say I remember them always being very supportive." This is generally the attitude he takes. He told about a dean who tried to convince him he wasn't capable of being a lawyer because he was disabled. "I went into his office in a T-shirt with my hair down to my shoulders. And when I saw what was on his mind I was shocked. I thought he was going to tell me I was a long haired hippy freak." Paul let the dean know he didn't agree with his philosophy. But once out of his office he says he forgot him. "Why waste my energy on him? There were far more problems to deal with than him.

"A really important thing is that you are the arbiter of your own fate. I'm always surprised how many people are walking around out there who don't know that. It's important for all people but especially for disabled people.

"There's a negative attitude; many disabled people play on it--some people may not have overcome their own attitude about their disability. As a disabled person I have to put out extra. As I got older I saw that. I see it across the board that what I have to do is make an effort on an emotional and intellectual level . . . I have to be able to assuage the person's fear. About five or six years ago I used to feel like throwing people out of my office. I had no patience. Now I feel there's value in trying to communicate with people who are in that grey area of acceptance. I think disabled people have to make an extra effort. In both professional as well as the social context. At least initially. You get what you give out.

"Get a skill, but one you're interested in. You've got to sell a skill not your disability, no one gives a damn about your disability. But don't look for short cuts.

I must sound like John Wayne. But I strongly believe you have to commit yourself. And contacts with the marketplace are crucial--ask your friends and family, and join a job hunt club if you can. It's a lot of hard work. But the bottom line is that it's a combination of skill, luck and timing. You have to have a sense of humor about it. You really do. It's no good otherwise."

It wasn't until we had a second conversation about something else that I remembered to ask him what his disability was. "Osteogenesis imperfecta," he said. He quickly added that because of his brittle bones he was in bed from age five to eleven. Then he went into a mid-breast body cast until he was twenty-two and moved into the wheelchair that he's in today. Anything else? Sure, plenty of jokes, and invitations to his favorite neighborhood pub. But nothing more about his childhood. Having a disability was just the way it was.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about Paul's opinion that it's up to a disabled person to put the other person at ease?

2. What did Paul mean when he said, "You've got to sell your skill and not your disability, no one gives a damn about your disability"?

3. Have you ever planned a trip on your own or with some friends? During the interview Paul said his trip through Europe was one of the most important things he's ever done. Why do you think it was?

THE IDEA CORNER

Some situations require more than just clearly expressed ideas. Sometimes it's necessary to be more assertive. In some situations when you're expressing your ideas, it would be helpful to know what your legal rights are. Listed below are three sources that may be helpful to you.

Do you have a clear idea of what questions aren't allowed on a job interview? Does your counselor have a list of illegal questions? You may decide to compile a list as a project or perhaps you'll want to enlarge the idea and plan a workshop for your college discussing the legal rights of the disabled. The American Civil

Liberties Union has a series of paperbacks on the rights of various groups such as students, veterans, and aliens. In that series is The Rights of Physically Handicapped People by Kent Hall. Paul Hearne, interviewed in this chapter, wrote a section of the book. It's published in paperback by Avon Books.

Are you interested in learning how to file a complaint? You can file a complaint at the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) if you feel you have been discriminated against because of your disability. It doesn't cost anything and can be done anonymously, as a group, or individually. The complaint form has very specific categories that you fill out. After reviewing your complaint form, if OCR feels you have a legitimate complaint, they'll proceed. This is an administrative procedure that involves negotiation. If you instead want to use litigation you have the second choice of hiring an attorney and going to court. The tricky thing about 501, 503, and 504 is that they are new and in many cases have not been through the judicial process yet, so it's hard to predict how they'll be interpreted. This may seem strange. But in the legal world the law ultimately means what the judges say it means. For more information you could contact Handicapped Persons Legal Support Unit, 335 Broadway, Room 803, New York, New York 10013. They could send you materials they've prepared, or recommend an office in your area.

Disability Rights Education Defense Fund, Inc. (DREDF) is a new organization dedicated to the independent living movement and the civil rights of persons with disabilities. It's a non-profit public interest law firm operating in association with the Center for Independent Living of Berkeley, CA. They also maintain a resume bank and publish a newsletter. They can be contacted at 2032 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702; (415) 644-2555, (TTY) 744-2629.

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter dealt with the very complex topic of expressing ideas. We offered a number of suggestions for communicating idea messages as accurately as possible in different kinds of situations. We also suggested specific techniques to try to resolve disagreements you may have with other people. Finally we explored a bit the expression of ideas in the world of work. We think you'll find it valuable, whenever possible, to think ahead about your own career planning and to ask yourself in every part of this workbook: How might I be able to use these skills in planning my career, getting started in it, and moving ahead in it?

# CHAPTER THREE
# EXPRESSING YOUR FEELINGS

Feelings are a slippery thing to get hold of. One of the reasons is because some of us grew up being taught that it was somehow sort of bad manners to show your feelings in public. That you had to zip yourself in, make yourself presentable. Another reason it's sometimes hard to talk about how you feel is that there are so many different definitions of the same words about feelings. Also, it's always surprising that something that seems so obviously one way for one person can be felt so completely differently by someone else.

## TO GET STARTED

***Choose an emotion and have someone write it on the board. Then ask for definitions. Write them under the word. Why do you think there are several different definitions for the same word?

***People are sometimes reluctant to express their feelings, not only because they're afraid they'll bore or upset the other person, but because they feel the other person should know how they feel without being told. Yet one feeling can mean so many different things. For instance unhappy can mean hopeless, or upset, or just sorry. Here's a chart for you to fill in. Work by yourself placing the word in the category where you think it belongs. The words are: distressed, sorry, upset, down, lost, depressed, hopeless, bad, so-so.

| STRONG | MILD | WEAK |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

Now have each person in the group contribute at least one adjective that means feeling good about something; include words that represent strong, mild, and weak feelings. Each person now places all the words where each one thinks it belong on this chart:

| STRONG | MILD | WEAK |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

After you've filled in your charts get back together and compare yours with others.

***What are the benefits of expressing your feelings? Think of a situation when you finally expressed your feelings after holding back. What was that like? As a group discuss the benefits of expressing feelings. Write the reasons on the board.

***Sometimes in talking about this we get so concerned about expressing dissatisfaction, uncertainty or anger that we forget the other side, that is, telling people when they make us feel good. Why is it important to express positive feelings?

## TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

You recently went to renew your drivers license. But you didn't pass the eye test because your vision has been getting poorer. At school that afternoon you feel very frustrated as you listen to people talking about things that don't seem to matter. You find yourself wondering what else you won't be able to do if you continue to develop health related problems. Later a friend whom you usually really like approaches you in the hall and asks if you'll still be one of the drivers that weekend to an out-of-town meeting. You feel angry. It seems so silly to be taking a little meeting so seriously. When your friend asks you what's wrong, what do you say? Complete the story individually and then go on to the following activities.

***Have two people role play the situation, making up their own ending. Find out how they felt in their roles.

***Listen to a record of a popular song. Afterward tell how you felt listening to the record, and what about the record made you feel that way. How different were the feelings of the members of the group?

***Ask for a volunteer to show an emotion without using words. Afterward the class can decide if they think the emotion was illustrated well. If not, suggest ways for improving the message.

***Find a partner for this. Describe a situation where you expressed an emotion to someone. Then describe how you felt doing it, and how the other person reacted. The listener should try to help the speaker figure out why the situation went as it did.

## TO IMPROVE

Emotions are very personal. Each person experiences them differently. To express your emotions verbally, however, you must translate your personal feelings into words the other person will understand. There are a variety of techniques which can help you express your emotions more clearly.

One of the things you can do is to describe the specific situation which caused you to have the feeling. Feelings are usually triggered by specific events.

To explain your emotions it's important to think about the events that caused you to feel that way. By describing the specific situation which caused you to experience your feelings, you can help people better understand them. They can think about situations in which they felt the same and compare your reaction to their own feeling.

Another thing you can do is to identify the precise emotion you feel. A variety of words can be used to describe the same feeling. So if you can be as specific as possible it will help the person you're talking to understand you better. For example, it's better communication to say, "I'm angry about the unfair test question" than to say, "I'm upset about the test."

Sometimes it is possible to explain your feeling by telling what changes in the specific situation might have caused you to feel differently. This technique may also help you and the other person figure out a way to avoid bad feelings in the future.

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

***Make up a situation in which you tell a parent or instructor about something in particular which you have a strong feeling about. Use a partner to play the person you're talking to.

***If you were talking to someone and you got the feeling they were trying to hide their emotions, how could you use "checking it out" and "acknowledging" (from Chapter One) to help clarify?

**DURING THE WEEK**

1. Between now and the next time your group meets, watch for situations where you believe that someone is trying to hide emotions. Note the following so you can tell the group about it at the next session.

What specific things happen that make you think the person is trying to hide emotions?

Tell how you handle the situation.

2. Watch for a situation during the week when you are at first reluctant to express your emotions and then do express them. Note the following:

Why you are reluctant to express your feelings.

How you get yourself to put the feeling into words.

How you feel when you do express the feeling and how the other person(s) react.

**STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US**

- Sometimes when I'm unclear in expressing my feelings it's because I'm not sure myself how I feel. And there's really no way you can explain your feelings to someone else when you're not even sure of them. The thing is that it's a lot of work to stay on top of how you feel. And sometimes I may just want to coast, not to dig in to everything I do or say.

- I decided not to go to school this summer. I was going to try to pick up some extra credits to make up for the time I was in the hospital after the accident. But then I decided that I deserve a summer off like everyone else. I was so busy trying to prove how capable I am. Then I realized there's a difference between being too dependent, and just needing the kind of support and relief that everyone needs.

- When I lost my driver's license because my vision had gotten worse I was so depressed. I hate having to depend on people for rides. And I started imagining having to depend on people to do everything for me. I got so sensitive that one day when this guy opened a door for me I screamed at him that I may not be able to see perfectly but I could certainly open my own doors. The poor guy was completely shocked. He had no idea what was going on. I didn't either. Then I went home and pieced it together.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel that you have to be a super person because you have a disability? Have you found yourself pushing extra hard to prove you're capable?

2. Have you ever been in a situation like the one described by the person who lost his driver's license? What happened?

**HOW THEY DID IT**

## TERRY MOAKLEY

### Growing Up at Thirty

Terry Moakley has an office in a busy building on Park Avenue. His name plate is usually covered with piles of papers. And when he isn't attending a meeting he is answering his frequently ringing phone or dictating letters. He is the director of Barrier Free Design for the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association. So it's a little surprising to hear this fellow, who looks like a Dewar's White Label success profile say, "Just when I turned thirty I felt like I was finally beginning to grow up."

He has changed a lot over the years and is proud of that. But though he is thirty-six now and has a family of his own he admits that some things never change. "When I go home my parents hover over me," he said. "They're like hawks. I realized somewhere down the road that I have control over my life. There's no way I can change them. They'll always be like that. I love them very much. But it's up to me not to rely on them too much."

Terry had a spinal cord injury at the age of twenty-two. He talked about what it was like to become disabled. "I guess I have to go back to before it happened. I was kind of a big man on campus," he said listing all the organizations he belonged to. A swimming accident that fractured his neck sent him in a new direction. He moved into the Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital following the accident in 1968. "I spent the entire year there which really bums me out when I think about it. I missed 1968! Anyway. . . it was successful in that I got what I went there for--to learn how to be self-sufficient. There was tremendous camaraderie among the guys on the ward, and that really helped."

But he is quick to add that it was not an easy change. "Those years were spent trying to learn how to be independent, drinking a lot, and trying to forget I

was in a wheelchair. I used booze and marijuana a lot. One night I was so wrecked that I drove my car into a ditch. I was woken up the next morning by a cop who found me in a ditch forty miles from where the party had been."

He made the decision that it was time to straighten out, but it wasn't easy. Terry married in 1971, and looking back now he knows he wasn't ready. "I brought a lot of dependence with me. I expected my wife to be half lover and half nurse, and that wasn't fair to either of us. When we separated and I discovered that I could do things for myself it was like a giant weight being lifted off me.

"I'd probably have a very different life if I hadn't been disabled. I'd probably be teaching somewhere, or maybe working for a company. Who knows? It's really the little things that piss me off more than anything. I just broke my leg and there's nothing I can do about it. It's in a cast for eight weeks so there's no use crying in my beer. But I drop a tube of shampoo in the morning and really get furious. I'm ready to smash in the walls."

He talked about what it was like for people around him to adjust to his disability. "I lost a really good friend who just couldn't deal with me being disabled. But the other friends I had I stayed with."

When he taught college for two years he usually started his classes by explaining how he became disabled and that it was permanent. "But I wasn't there to say, 'Hey, I'm in a wheelchair, look at me!' I just thought they'd be curious and it would get us past that point sooner. There are some situations where it's good to tell people that you're disabled. And sometimes you're probably better off not saying anything." Terry said that in social situations where people are uncomfortable with his disability his general reaction is to shut up. "I don't feel any pressure to win friends. I'm not eighteen anymore. I have a really good home life, a good job, and both disabled and nondisabled friends."

"You'll get nowhere trying to use your disability. I've been successful here because I have certain skills I've developed. I can handle meetings, write letters. . . you just have to be productive. A disability can get you an entry level position, but it's not going to get you anywhere else in an agency worth their salt."

Talking about legislation, Terry said, "I think 504 is going to be very important. But we can't expect to be militant about everything. There are going to be trade offs. But learning about it really raised my own self esteem. It gave me a feeling of having a place in the country. And long after Reagan is gone it will remain. The law gave disabled people a sense of place and that can't be taken away by anyone."

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you think there are differences between people who are born with a disability and those like Terry, who became disabled later in life? Are there some of Terry's feelings and experiences that might have been different if he had been born with the disability?

2. Terry said that one of the problems with his first marriage was the fact that he expected his wife to be half lover and half nurse. Do you think there are always going to be problems when disabled and non-disabled people marry? Do you make a point of always going out with disabled, or always going out with non-disabled people? Why?

3. What kind of decision did Terry eventually come to about his parents? What do you think of this?

## Some Feelings on Becoming Disabled

--by Carolyn O'Neill

I am unique;
I am here;
I am who I am.

Carolyn O'Neill is a college student at Nassau Community College who found herself suddenly disabled. She remembers that when she came out of the coma in the hospital her first concern was missing her plane for the trip to Florida she had planned. Because of her illness she entered a whole new world. She joined the deaf club on campus but felt very left out. One day she was talking to her counselor and said she'd like to start a group made up of others who had also recently become disabled, and her counselor offered to help. Her experience in doing this may be of interest to you and perhaps you may want to consider starting such a group. Often short-term rap groups can help people deal with a difficult time in their lives by allowing them to express and share their experiences and feelings. One way to start is to send a letter to potential group members. Here is the letter Carolyn wrote when she decided to start a group.

Dear Students,

I am writing to you because I found out recently that there were many newly disabled people at Nassau like myself. I always thought I was alone.

I am 19 years old and have been deaf one long year. On February 11th it will be one year. I share many of the same feelings that you might have. At times I feel very frustrated and angry. I ask questions like why me? Why couldn't it happen to someone who didn't enjoy life? What did I ever do wrong? At times I feel very alone. I feel my friends either don't have the time for me anymore, or they just don't want to be bothered with a disabled person. (I use the word disabled instead of handicapped because I don't feel I am a handicapped person, only disabled.) Many times I feel like throwing everything I've worked so hard for away. I say what's the use. But I know I would only be hurting myself. I realize I don't want to be labeled as disabled. I want to be me; I want to feel the way I did one year ago.

Does anyone feel the way I do? Won't you share with me your feelings whether happy or sad? If it won't help you it sure will help me to release some of my feelings. Please come even just for a little while. If you have been able to cope with your disability, maybe people who have the fears, frustrations, and emotions you once had will be encouraged to open up and try to understand a little better.

I would like to start a rap session involving recently disabled people who want to share or listen.

We will have our first session Thursday, February 19 at 11:30 in T140. If you have any questions feel free to write to me at home.

Please come and share,

Carolyn O'Neill

Carolyn agreed to having her letter reproduced here because she felt it may help other students. She also told us some of her feelings that led up to her starting the group.

"I guess the hardest part of being deaf was having to change many of my ways of life. Before I became deaf I loved to be around and talk to many different kinds of people. I never enjoyed small groups, but now I become very depressed with large groups. I can't read lips and I feel very left out. Deep inside me I get very bitter and hurt. I feel many people are very ignorant. Many people would rather talk around me than to me and it hurts. Many nights I lie awake and ask the same questions over and over to myself.

"I feel becoming deaf made me very lonely. I don't really feel part of anything any longer. When I go out with my boyfriend Jimmy and our friends, I don't get involved in conversations. Many friends have turned away from me. Jimmy met me six months before I went deaf and now we have been together over two years. He talks slower and tries to keep our company small-grouped for my benefit. He says he loves me for who I am and what I stand for and believe in, not what I lost.

"I try not think about the sounds I don't hear. I try to think about what I'm going to do with my life to help other people who have to carry a disability with them. Many times I wish I could turn around and say, 'OK, I've had enough. I want my hearing back now.'

"In college I have an interpreter in my classes, but it's very frustrating because I rely on lip reading. I once told one of my teachers to please talk slower so I could try and follow. His reply was, 'I've been talking this way for over forty-one years, and it's pretty hard to change now.' I felt like screaming, 'I've heard for eighteen-and-a-half years, it's harder for me to change.'

"Why can't people have a little more compassion? I'm not saying all people are like that. Some of my teachers want to learn sign language. And some teachers really make me get involved in discussions and it feels great. I feel a part of school when they do that. I realize I have to push to get things I need and want to do.

"I have many dreams for my future, on getting through college and getting a good job where I'll be able to help handicapped children, and getting married and having a family. But I guess my biggest dream is being able to hear again. . .to hear simple things like rain on a roof, or leaves blowing around, or someone telling me they love me.

"It's a very hard thing to carry around a handicap, and not be able to communicate. But I'll try it because I've got so much to live for and so much to plan and do. I started the rap session with newly handicapped people because I felt we had something in common. We all lost something which at some point was very valuable to us. But we were able to compensate. We were able to share our emotions, frustrations and our coping skills together. As one guy said (who was hurt very badly in a car accident), 'I would not have chosen this road to follow, but because I was given it, I'll do it.' "

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

Expressing feelings is in some ways one of the most difficult of interpersonal skills. Not only do you have to be concerned about being aware of your feelings, and expressing them clearly, but you also have to recognize how the other person reacts to your expression of feelings. This chapter should help you improve your skills in this area. That could be especially valuable in adjusting to future jobs because research has indicated that personal and emotional factors are among the most crucial in holding a job. Whatever skills you develop now should stand you in good stead for many years.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# HANDLING QUESTIONS

"That's a very good question!" Most of us have heard a teacher say that. Did you ever wonder what made the question a good one? Knowing when and how to ask a question in a classroom is fairly easy. But learning how to ask a supervisor at work why you are being asked to do something or knowing how not to answer an illegal question at a job interview is a little more difficult.

IN THIS CHAPTER we will be discussing these things as well as why questions are helpful, the difference between closed and open questions, and how to refuse someone's request for information.

## TO GET STARTED

Imagine that when registering for the next semester you see a course offered by the physical education department that you're very interested in. You've always wanted to take a class like that but have never gotten around to it. So you go talk to the professor to find out more about it. The professor is helpful. As you talk, it becomes obvious that the professor is interested in how your disability affects you.

***Have two volunteers act out the scene. They should decide what the course is so they can make the dialogue as realistic as possible. Remember, both people have questions they want to ask. After they've finished, make two columns on the blackboard--one of questions the student asked, and one of the questions the professor asked.

***There are different reasons for asking questions. Sometimes you want to get information or clarify a point. Other times you may be asking a question to show interest or introduce a new topic. Look at the questions on the blackboard to decide the reasons they were asked.

***Were the two volunteers clear in asking their questions? Sometimes people confuse matters by doing things like apologizing for asking a question. Can you think of other mistakes that people often make in asking questions? Did you notice any in the skit?

***Have you ever asked a question and been confused by the answer? Sometimes people don't give enough information or give too much, or stray off the topic. Did you see any examples of that in the skit?

## TO IMPROVE

Though we usually don't think of it this way there are basically two types of questions: <u>closed</u> and <u>open</u>.

People who want to receive a specific bit of information often ask <u>closed questions</u>. These questions usually specify the precise type of information they want to receive. Frequently, closed questions also help people structure their answers. For example, multiple choice, true or false, and short answer tests often contain closed questions. To answer these questions you make precise, factual statements without elaborating on them. When responding to a closed-ended

question it is often helpful if you answer the specific question as precisely as possible.

Open-ended questions are helpful when people want others to elaborate on their beliefs, thoughts, or feelings. Essay tests, for example, usually contain open-ended questions. When answering an open-ended question you can express your ideas as fully as possible.

Sometimes you're asked a question that you don't want to answer. You could be in a job interview, in class, or talking to a friend. A bit further on we'll discuss ways you can politely refuse to answer people's questions. Right now we want to mention three types of questions which people are commonly asked that you may feel you should not answer: questions about the future, personal questions, and illegal questions.

Although it's impossible to know exactly what we're going to do in the future, people still ask us our plans. Sometimes it's necessary to give an answer--your counselor wants to know if you'll be in school next semester, or your supervisor needs to know if you'll still be working there this summer. But other times you may feel someone is trying to get an unfair commitment out of you. By thinking about it ahead of time you can plan an answer you're satisfied with.

Frequently questions require us to share personal information about our lives. Rather than deciding if we should answer these questions, we often feel we have to answer them. In a job interview you might be asked how you'll be getting to work, or if you plan to have children. Some people prefer to get to the reason they were asked the question by assuring the interviewer they are very interested in the job and would make it a point to meet the commitments involved.

There are many questions that are illegal for people to ask on job interviews. Do you know what they are? How would you react if you knew that you were asked an illegal question?

## NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

***Look at the questions below. See if you all agree on which are open-ended and which are closed-ended questions.

Do you enjoy college life?
Which classes do you like best?
Why do you enjoy that class?
How many courses are you taking this semester?
Have you applied for any jobs?
When are you going to graduate?
What kind of job do you want?

Which type of questions do you think you use most frequently? How could you improve your ability to ask questions?

***Examine some copies of an advice column such as Dear Abby or Ann Landers. See if the writer's question is clear, and analyze the columnist's answer, identifying any mistakes made in answering the question. (Sometimes they answer too generally or answer a different question than the one that was asked.)

***Form three different groups. Each group will work on appropriate replies in situations where you won't want to answer personal questions, illegal questions, and questions about the future. Then report your answers back to the group so they can be shared and discussed.

***Describe a situation where you wanted to refuse a request for information. If you answered it anyway, why did you? How did you feel afterwards? If you didn't answer it, how did you say no? How did you feel afterwards?

***If you decide not to answer a question you can:

--refuse to answer by saying: "I don't think it's appropriate for me to answer that."

--ask for the question to be clarified by saying: "Are you concerned about me being to work on time?"

--answer the implicit question tactfully but firmly such as, "I think you can count on me to get to work on time, whatever way I travel."

--change the subject by asking another question like, "Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

--pretend you didn't hear the question.

What would you do when asked a question you'd rather not answer? Practice with a friend answering questions in each of the five ways listed above. Which methods seem most harmonious with your own style? Which ones do you think would make the best impression on the person interviewing you?

## DURING THE WEEK

1. During the week write down any difficulties you or your friends encountered in asking or answering questions. Write down how the question was asked, the speaker's response to the question, and how the question could have been improved.

2. Have a conversation with a friend or a member of your family. Ask an open and a closed question. Write down both the question and how the person responded.

3. Think of a situation where you usually aren't an active listener, and make a point of asking questions. What happened as a result of you taking a more active role? How did you feel?

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

- Once a little kid stopped me on the street and asked what happened to me. She wanted to know why I was in a wheelchair. Her mother was real embarrassed and tried to drag her away. And the friend I was with wanted to keep going. But I explained my disability to her. I'm not sure why. . . I guess I felt sort of a responsibility, you know? I just thought that if you take the time to talk to little kids about it maybe they won't grow up with the same kinds of hang ups. I mean I've heard parents tell their kids that all disabled people are that way because they didn't look both ways before crossing the street.

- I think this whole chapter is silly. You don't decide ahead of time what you're going to say or how to answer some questions. Maybe you do if you're president and you're going on "Meet the Press." But life isn't like a T.V. show. You just say whatever comes to your mind. And if someone asks about my disability I don't say anything. It's none of their business.

- After you decide how you're going to tell people about your disability you sort of develop a regular routine. It's almost like sliding in a tape and putting yourself on automatic. I do it in all new situations. But you have to be careful about overkill. Sometimes I'm so "on" that it becomes a monologue. I've checked out the situation and decided, "Oh here's another nondisabled person uncomfortable about my disability." That may not be true. And it really isn't fair to act as if all nondisabled people are the same, as if they all have the same hang ups.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever thought of asking questions as being a skill? How do you think you are in this area?

2. What do you think about the second comment? Can you decide in advance what you will tell people about your disability?

**HOW THEY DID IT**

## ALICE JACOBS

### You Have to Sell Yourself

After talking to Alice Jacobs for ten minutes you'll want to go to work where she works. Though she insists her enthusiasm is because her company is such an excellent employer, she would probably be just as convincing about her past jobs as a lab technician, full-time mother, and writer. A pre-med major in college, Alice said, "I certainly never thought I'd work for a company. I was one of those people who thought they were above the 'corporate mentality'."

Seeing the easy attitude she has in her office, it's hard to believe that she was a mother and homemaker for 20 years, and didn't join the corporate world until she was in her forties. She remembered those years at home and then talked about when she became disabled. She was twenty-seven and pregnant with her second child when she contracted polio. "I have a very hot head. My family surrounded me with all this wonderful help. I could have stayed in bed for years until my fingernails grew as long as a Chinese emperor's. But I felt smothered.

"We rigged up a desk so I could diaper the baby," she continued. "It's amazing how quickly children adapt. I would usually go around with the baby in my lap and my little boy riding on the back of my wheelchair."

When she reentered the job market in 1969 she didn't find employers quite as adaptable. Though she is responsible for developing her company's affirmative action compliance program she laughs about the pre-affirmative action years that now seem like the stone age. At that time the real test for getting a job didn't seem as much making it past the interview as being able to fit into the bathroom. She says she made it through those years thanks to her family, her sense of humor, and coffee cans. "Coffee cans are one of the most amazing things. They're

portable. They have lids. I've gone to the bathroom in front of the best places in the world."

Alice has an easy laugh and a generous, enthusiastic style. But she takes getting a job very seriously. She sees a lot of similarities between being a member of a minority group, being a woman, and being disabled. "It's the idea that in order to succeed in the work world you have to be a superstar. You have to prove to everybody over and over again that you can do the job. Very often I find that people who have been disabled since birth are less patient with the nondisabled person's stereotypes. But I've been one of those ignorant people. So I'm willing to take the time to educate the public about disabilities."

She takes the same pragmatic view of the job interview. "There are questions the interviewer isn't allowed to ask. But the curiosity is there. So I tell them--how I'm going to get to work, what accommodations I'll need, etc." In one of her early jobs before accessibility was required she couldn't get in the bathroom. "But I didn't tell them because I really wanted the job." After she felt she had proven herself as a valuable worker she began to make her needs known.

When asked what tips she would give to college students, Alice stressed assertiveness. Not aggressiveness, she added, but you have to learn how to sell yourself and your ideas. She added that before you can do that you have to have a sound self-image, come clean with yourself about exactly what your strengths are and where you need more work. And that got her into her third point which was that just as employers have to make reasonable accommodations for employees, so do employees have to make adjustments for their employer. She suggested that if you have a speech involvement and your job involves answering the phone you could mention your speech at the beginning of the phone conversation, making it clear you will be willing to repeat. It's not demeaning to do that, she added, you have to get in there and do the job. Because employers, she stressed, will hire disabled people only as long as it's good business.

Alice Jacobs is not the real name of the person interviewed. Alice, as we are calling her, was uncomfortable seeing some of her statements in print. She felt they would be inappropriate for her corporate image. It was a difficult decision. Though she felt that the things she said should be said, she is also realistic about the requirements of maintaining a professional demeanor in the work world. The compromise we came up with was to print her interview as it is but to change her name. We decided to mention it because this kind of decision is an important reality in the work world. When you're working you make decisions everyday about how to present yourself to coworkers, supervisors, and the public. The kind of decision you make is influenced by your personality, of course. But it is also influenced by the kind of setting in which you work. Various jobs require not only different skills, but also different actions, appearances, and attitudes.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with Alice on the point she makes about the similarity between minorities, women, and the disabled?

2. Do you think it would be easier or harder to enter the job market now than it was in the 1960's?

3. How would you decide when to satisfy the curiosity of a prospective employer and when to hold back some information about yourself until you've been on the job awhile?

## THE IDEA CORNER

Whether or not you're pretty set as to the kind of occupation you're going into, you may find it helpful to interview an employed worker. If you're pretty sure what your choice is, interviewing somebody in the field of your choice should help you know better what is ahead of you and how best to prepare for it. On the other hand, if you have not decided on your occupation, interviewing people in different fields might help you decide.

In either case, you need to ask good questions. The following form, given to us by Natalie Rubinton of Kingsborough Community College, would be a good starting point. Naturally you'll want to add your own questions and use your new question asking skills in order to get your interviewee to talk fully and tell you all that you want to know.

It may be helpful at the next session of the group to compare notes with others in the group who have conducted interviews this week.

### ADULT INTERVIEW FORM

1. Whom do you work for?_____
2. Just what do you do?_____

   _____
3. How old were you when you decided on this occupation?_____
4. What other occupations have you seriously considered?_____

   _____
5. Do you enjoy your work?_____
6. What activities on your job do you enjoy most?_____

   _____
7. What activities do you enjoy least?_____

   _____

8. Can you tell me about a specific occasion when a particularly good thing happened to you at work? _____

_____

9. Can you tell me about a specific occasion when you had a bad time at work?

_____

10. Do you expect to be on this job 10 years from now? What else might you be doing? _____

11. Are there good opportunities for young people in your occupation? _____

_____

12. Roughly how much money does the average person in your occupation make?

_____

13. What is the best training for your work? _____

_____

There's a newsletter you might want to get. It's called Real World and has great articles about people in different kinds of jobs. It's available at reduced prices for multiple copies, so you might want to ask your counselor to try it out with groups. Real World is available through King Features, Education Division, Department 1405, 235 West 45th Street, New York, New York 10017, (212) 682-5600.

Another good thing to use in a group is Job Club Counselor's Manual by Nathan Azrin and Victoria Besdel. It helps you find a job by working in a group. Your advisor might have a copy of it, or be willing to start such a group.

Finally, there are two all time basic resources about the world of work. One is the Occupational Outlook Handbook, which describes occupations and predicts the prospects for each job in the future. The other is the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which is exactly what the name suggests--dictionary-type definitions of thousands of occupational titles. Both should be in the counseling center and the college library.

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

Asking and answering questions doesn't sound like a very exciting topic. And it isn't, in and of itself. But it comes to life when you start using those questions for important purposes. One such purpose is illustrated in the interview form we've included in the Idea Corner section of this Chapter. Interviewing workers in an occupation is one of the best ways to learn about that occupation (and about different kinds of people too!). Do use that interview outline--several times if you can--and sharpen your skills in handling questions.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# STARTING CONVERSATIONS

Every semester you meet new people in your classes. In the work world you'll also be meeting new people--supervisors, co-workers, and people in other departments. Although we're constantly meeting others, many of us feel uncomfortable when we're introduced to someone. Sometimes we feel unsure how to act or what to say.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll be discussing some tips that might make it easier to meet people. We'll discuss ways to start a conversation, how to keep a conversation going, and techniques for improving business conversations.

## TO GET STARTED

Do you remember how you felt when you started college? Try to remember what it was like being new and how you got to know some of the people around you. Think about how you handled yourself among new people--how you introduced yourself and what you did to start conversations.

***Find a partner and spend a few minutes describing some of the techniques you used for starting a conversation and getting to know other people.

***Now you and your partner set up a brief role play that is based on a specific getting acquainted incident--one you remember from your first weeks or months in college. As far as time permits, each pair do the role play in front of the class. Then get together and compare the different approaches.

## TO IMPROVE

There are many different ways to start a conversation. You may already do many of these without thinking about them. One of the first things you can do is introduce yourself. In most conversations there's a period of "breaking the ice" when people get to know each other. What you say about yourself will be different for a disco, a classroom, and an office. But the idea is the same--you're telling some things about yourself that you think might interest the other person. After you've finished you can say, "Tell me something about you." By giving a little background about yourselves you can get over some of the initial stiffness that's usually there on first encounters.

Next you can find a topic. People often begin talking to one another about shared experiences. While talking you may discover that you have lived in the same city, gone to the same school, or have a hobby in common. It's usually easier to relax and enjoy a conversation if you're talking about something like a shared interest since it's something you're knowledgeable about and interested in. And don't forget about your nonverbal communication. Your facial expression, body posture, and voice tone can all be used to demonstrate your interest in another person's comments. This kind of nonverbal communication often helps people relax. And as they become more comfortable it's easier to join in on a conversation.

Though it may sound as if these techniques will make you into a whole new person, the next thing we're going to mention is the importance of being yourself. If you're a serious person say something serious about the day's news or something else that interests you. If you're lightheaded, follow that mood. If you come across genuinely, people will usually feel more comfortable than if you try to play a role that isn't you.

Using humor is often another useful technique when starting a conversation. We're not suggesting that you carry around a 3x5 card with jokes on it to use each time you meet a new person. But if you feel comfortable adding some humor, this is often a good way of relieving tension. But sometimes you have to be careful that the other person understands that you're joking.

Sometimes you can help people relax by alluding to your disability and explaining how it will affect you in that situation. Frequently other people don't know whether they should mention your disability, or even appear to notice it. You can help clear the air by matter-of-factly making a brief comment such as, "I guess you've noticed that I . . . ." or "It will help me if you'll face me when you talk so I . . . ."

You may have a very strong opinion on whether or not it's your responsibility to discuss your disability. Some people do mention it at work but don't socially. The interviews at the end of each chapter of this book give some people's approaches. By role playing different responses and using the group for feedback you may come to a decision you're comfortable with.

**TRY THESE ACTIVITIES:**

***Find a partner for this. First set up a specific situation, then take turns explaining your disability to the other person. Afterwards tell the group how you felt. Would you feel comfortable discussing your disability in a light or joking manner? How would you feel if someone else joked about your disability?

***Describe a situation in which you introduced yourself to someone you had just met. Describe how you

--began the conversation

--made the other person feel comfortable

--found a common topic of discussion

***Ask two volunteers to role play meeting someone and starting a conversation. When they've finished ask the group to describe how each person helped begin the conversation. Then ask the role players to react to those descriptions. Are their reactions different?

***For some disabled people obtaining medical care is a frequent part of life. All of us have experienced the numbing feeling of sitting too long in a waiting room only to be asked what kind of medical insurance we have. The whole point of this chapter (and the whole book) is to take an active role in your life. Can you think how you could use the techniques in this chapter to help in obtaining medical care? Do you frequently have to deal with new staff where you go? Role play a situation in a clinic where you use the techniques discussed above with a new physical therapist.

**TO IMPROVE:** Formal Conversations

So far we've been dealing mostly with social conversations, but there are also conversations that you'll have in your work, or maybe in school. You may be trying to plan something, or solve a problem, or resolve a dispute. There are some special techniques that will be helpful in formal conversations. Unlike personal discussions, business conversations focus on specific topics. Each person is expected to participate actively in the discussion. During a business conversation, your use of both verbal and nonverbal communication skills affects the other person's thoughts and feelings. You project not only your own self-image but also your organization's image.

In contrast to social conversations, business discussions are often scheduled to accomplish a specific purpose. They are more productive if each person makes relevant comments about the topic being discussed. By making relevant comments, participants demonstrate that they are listening and want to contribute to the conversation. For instance, if you find yourself wandering off the topic, you might say "I guess that gets us into something else. . . maybe we should back up."

When time is running out and you feel there's still a lot to discuss, it's a good idea to consider changing the topic. You can do this without being rude. One way is by acknowledging the topic being discussed but adding that you're concerned

about running out of time and also want to discuss the other things on the agenda.

During a lengthy business conversation major points are sometimes forgotten. It is often helpful if one person summarizes earlier comments. You can summarize either the conversation's emotional theme, idea theme, or both. One way to do this is to review the deadlines and assignments decided on. Or if the meeting is more formal you may decide to ask for a copy of the minutes. Even in an informal meeting, it's a good idea to make notes about important points.

Sometimes at work you'll receive a compliment for a project you completed. Though your first impulse may be to insist it wasn't anything, it would be better to say something like, "I appreciate your mentioning that; I worked very hard on it." When people compliment you they are telling you that something you did impressed or pleased them. If you are embarrassed by the compliment they might assume their observation was unimportant or inaccurate.

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES:**

***Ask a volunteer to write four or five techniques to help start a conversation. Ask two people to start a conversation in front of class, and check off the approaches that they used.

***Improve a situation in which you use humor to relieve tension. How else could you do it?

***Make up a situation where you practice telling about your disability. You may want to choose a situation where you're at a job interview and will explain how your disability will affect you at work.

***Have someone write on the board the five ways that can be used to keep a conversation going. Try using them with a partner so you can get an idea of which feels natural for you.

***Ask for volunteers to role play three different conversations in which they practice changing the topic, summarizing the discussions, and accepting compliments.

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Watch a show on T.V. and look for a situation where two people meet. Take some notes so you can report back to the group how the two actors

   --introduced themselves
   --used nonverbal behavior
   --found a conversation topic
   --focused their conversation
   --summarized their conversation
   --changed the topic
   --accepted a compliment

2. Find one of the techniques that you think you need more work on--changing the topic, accepting a compliment, or something else--and make a point of using it at least twice before the next session. Be prepared to let the group know which one you chose, how you did it, and how you felt using it.

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

- When I started college I got a work study job in the cafeteria. I knew that way I'd be around other students and have a chance to meet people. Talking about how bad the food was was always a great topic to start with.

- I've had some bad experiences as an out patient getting physical therapy. The way the hospital treated me I felt like I was no more important than a broken toaster on a conveyor belt. Then I decided I was going to talk to the therapists and aides. At first it was like forcing myself at them. I could tell they just wanted to do their job and get me out. But I kept talking to them, and not only to make demands--I have to work on this, I have to get in in the afternoon, and all that. But I started asking them how their day was going or explaining why it was important to me to work on certain exercises, and thanking them when things went well. It was a real change. I wasn't just another body to them anymore.

- If you want to keep people's attention you have to be talking about something that interests them. And my supervisor at work says there are three things that everyone is interested in--money, sex, and themselves.

Suggested Questions

1. Do you agree with the comment that carrying on a conversation is a way of asserting yourself as a person instead of just another body? Have you ever had a similar experience?

2. What things do you do to start a conversation? Do you plan to try some of the techniques mentioned in this chapter? If so, when and how?

## JEFFREY FRANKEL

### "Everyone is Disabled in Some Way"

Jeff Frankel is the kind of counselor you'd like to have on campus. He's young enough to remember the headaches of counting credits, but experienced enough to give sound suggestions on getting a part-time job or choosing a career. Jeff is a counselor in the Office for Disabled Students at Nassau Community College.

In high school he had wanted to be a disc jockey. But in college he began to turn toward psychology. He sees one of the reasons for this as his involvement in student government when he was himself a student at Nassau Community College. As president of his freshman class he organized a committee to eliminate architectural barriers on campus.

But perhaps more than this, or more than his exposure to the field through his father who was a psychiatrist, was his own experience of being the only child on the rehabilitation ward of Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

"When I was born I was what is commonly known as a blue baby," Jeff said with the patience of someone who has told the story many times before.

"I had a shunt operation when I was eighteen months old which temporarily repaired my heart disorder. But I still got out of breath easily. I remember once I had been outside running around huffing and puffing and my father took me aside and told me I had to be careful. And I asked why. I was about four. And I remember sitting at the dining room table while he explained to me about the operation. I was crying. It really scared me. At that time my life expectancy was about sixteen.

"When I was a kid I used my disability. I was real skinny, and very introverted. And I'd get in these situations where the class bully would come after

me and I'd scream, 'Don't hit me, I have a heart condition. I'll die.' And he'd cream me anyway. Once I went home crying so my father decided to teach me how to box. You know, the Bronx macho thing. But I still got beat up.

"I had forgotten all about this until just now but I had this fantasy of being a general in Sacramento, California. I don't know why California, I heard of it somewhere and I thought it was paradise. I wanted to be a general, this big macho guy in control of everything, and my teddy bear was a soldier who got hurt and always needed heart surgery. It's funny how kids play those kinds of games. Then when I got older I'd catch fish, open them and sew them back up, then keep a chart to see how long they'd live."

When Jeff was around ten his parents began talking with doctors about surgery to repair his heart. When it began to look like he was a good candidate they told him about it. "They told me I'd be able to run more and play football. That I'd be a pioneer because it was a new surgery." It was open heart surgery. And to make sure it was right for him he had to undergo tests over a two year period. "I got more and more worried. I had nightmares about dying." But when the time came he says he was excited. "It was June 29, 1965. I remember thinking I was going to the hospital to get a new heart. I had just turned twelve and I felt like it was the best birthday present I could ever have."

But nine days after the surgery Jeff was working on a braided key chain an occupational therapist had given him, when he got a headache. Then he got a burning sensation in his throat before a seizure began. When he woke up his mother was at his bed. She told him that he had had a stroke and that his left side was paralyzed.

"I really felt gypped. I thought that if I went ahead with the operation I'd be better. And now I was worse than I had ever been."

Talking about his move to the rehab ward, Jeff remembers it as he saw it as a child. He remembers that everyone was so much older than him. Then he

remembers the extra malteds the nurses used to sneak him, and being told by a group of doctors that they were writing about him in a journal. "I never thought of my stroke as being sick," he said. "It was just another thing that happened to me. But I asked a lot of questions, I was always asking the nurses and doctors what they were doing and why."

The following year Jeff's father died of a heart attack. Jeff continued with school and eventually graduated from college with a major in social sciences. After a year off when he worked for an insurance company, a department store, and a community health clinic, he entered a graduate program in rehabilitation counseling at California State University, Fresno. Though he has seen both good and bad professionals in his many experiences as a patient, he enjoys being in the field himself. "I like the challenge of my job. I really enjoy seeing people achieve. I don't think there's much difference between people; everyone is disabled in some way."

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. How do Jeff's experience as a kid with a disability compare with memories from your own childhood?
2. How did Jeff's parents deal with his disability? Do you agree with what they did?
3. What do you think Jeff meant when he said, "Everyone is disabled in some way"? Do you think that's true?

## THE IDEA CORNER

During the interview one of the things Jeff Frankel mentioned was a trip to Israel as a high school student, and later trips across country. He made a point of going to graduate school in California so he could explore another part of the country. You may be wondering what this has to do with the chapter title of "Starting Conversations." One of the best ways to develop the confidence necessary to assert yourself in conversation is to expose yourself to the everyday challenges involved in travelling. Not only do you learn self-sufficiency, but you may end up seeing ways of living you have never even considered. And that will stir up your own thoughts, maybe even make you question some of the values you had always just accepted.

Whether you're stopping at a state park in a neighboring town, or taking a train through a foreign country you'll soon find the easy way of talking that fellow travelers have with each other. And you will probably find yourself in conversations with people you had never even imagined existed.

You may not need the kinds of services listed below. If you don't you could pass the list on to a friend who could use it. Either way this section may just start you planning a trip:

Access Amtrak, describes accessible trains and stations, free from National Railroad Passenger Corporation, 955 L' Enfant Plaza S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024.

Access Travel: Airports, lists 220 airports in 27 countries free from architectural and transportation barriers. Compliance Board, 330 C Street S.W., Washington , D.C. 20201.

The Handicapped Drivers' Mobility Guide, available for fifty cents from local AAA office or write to American Automobile Association, 8111 Statehouse Road, Hills Church, Virginia 22042.

Highway Rest Areas for Handicapped Travelers. Free listing of 4000 rest areas in the U.S. President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, 1111 20th Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20210.

Hand Controls and Assistive Devices for the Physically Disabled Driver. The National Center on Employment of the Handicapped at Human Resources Center, Albertson, New York 11507.

Access National Parks, lists the accessible facilities in the national park system. $3.50 from Access, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

List of Guidebooks for Handicapped Travelers. Free from the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, 1111 20th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210.

International Directory of Access Guides, an aid for disabled and elderly travelers from Rehabilitation World, Travel Survey Department, 20 West 46 Street, New York, NY 10018.

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

There are people who are easily outgoing; they always seem to be able to think of something to say. Others are more introverted, quieter. Certainly you have to be true to yourself; nothing in this chapter is intended to imply a challenge to that principle. But people can change and perhaps the most important basis for becoming a better conversationalist is to become more attuned to others, to try to learn something about the other person. Then you will probably see that it is enriching to your own life to touch other people's lives. And maybe that's the most important message we can leave with you on the subject of starting and maintaining conversations.

# CHAPTER SIX
# USING FEEDBACK

It used to be that the only people concerned about feedback were singers or speakers who had to adjust their mikes or their amplifiers. But now the term feedback has become a common one that we all accept as meaning a response. Dealing with people isn't as easy as adjusting a machine. But the techniques discussed below may help you clear out some of the annoying static that gets between you and others.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll be discussing ways to ask for feedback, respond to feedback, and give feedback.

## TO GET STARTED

Assume that next semester you'll be starting your last year of college. You've been talking to a friend about sharing an apartment when you graduate. But now your friend has found one that you two could move into next month. You're surprised. You hadn't thought about moving out until next year. But the more you think about it, the more it appeals to you. Thinking about what to say to your parents, you realize that they'll try to talk you out of it. You imagine them saying, "Why rush it?" "You're too young to move out." "What if there's an emergency?" Have three people from your group act out the scene where the student is talking to both parents and explaining the proposed move.

In the scene above how did the three people act? Did it seem realistic? Could you have seen it ending better if they had done certain things differently? Have a second group act out the scene. But this time give them definite roles--the mother will do this, the father's attitude is that, the student's concern is this. See whether they played the assigned roles and whether the negotiation went any better than the first one. What tentative conclusions would you reach as to how to best handle this kind of situation?

## TRY THESE ACTIVITIES:

***Have you ever had a professor who was not clear about what he or she required--so that you weren't sure how you were doing in that class? Describe the background and role play the situation. In this situation you're asking for feedback.

***Imagine that you're heading a committee in student government and someone on your committee has completed a project earlier than you expected. You're surprised and very glad. Would you let the person know you're pleased with the work? If you would, what would you say? Role play this; it is called giving feedback.

***How would you handle it if the person missed a deadline and did the work a week late? Try acting it out. Which is easier for you, giving positive feedback or giving negative feedback?

***You have a summer job and the person supervising you has called you in to talk about how you're doing. The person you're acting this out with should give you both positive and negative feedback. This is called getting feedback.

**TO IMPROVE**

Many times we want to know other people's reactions to us--to our behavior, our ideas, or our feelings. We want them to send us feedback. Because people send different types of messages it's often difficult to know what kind of feedback someone wants. Here are three techniques to help make it clearer that you are asking for feedback.

Describe the specific action, idea or feeling about which you want to receive feedback. You can say something like, "I'd like to discuss the monthly report with you so I'll have a better idea what you want" rather than saying, "Would you tell me how I'm doing?"

Another thing you can do is specify the type of feedback you want to receive. Do you want them to tell you what they think or how they feel about the situation? Is it feelings you want or thoughts?

And thirdly you can let them know what it is you're looking for. If you want other people to make suggestions, tell them the types of suggestions you want to receive. Do you want them to send messages for improving or helping you better understand the situation? Do you want general or specific suggestions, abstract or concrete ones?

Once you start receiving feedback there are two kinds you might get--positive and negative. Here are some ways of responding to both of them.

Positive feedback tells you that others like what you did. Expressing your appreciation encourages future positive feedback. Among the phrases which you can use are: "Thank you for noticing," "I really worked hard on that project, thanks for the compliment," "I appreciate knowing how you felt about . . ."

It is difficult for many people to receive negative feedback. When they realize that their behavior is upsetting others they frequently become angry, are embarrassed, or feel hurt.

When you receive negative feedback it's often helpful if you ask yourself the following four questions. What is he really criticizing? Me in general or a specific thing I do? Exactly what is it I do that upsets that person? How does that person want me to change my behavior? Can I change just that behavior, or would I have to change more?

How could you use the skills discussed in the chapter on active listening to clarify situations in which you received negative feedback? One thing you could do is say something like, "I am sorry you aren't entirely satisfied with my work. I'd appreciate it if you would explain a little more just what it is you'd like me to change."

When you're certain that you understand the person's suggestions, think about the proposed changes. In your opinion are the suggestions reasonable? Is there a reason why you can't change your behavior? Would you feel comfortable changing your behavior?

After considering the suggested change it is often helpful if you explain how you are going to respond. In some situations you might need another person's assistance in order to change your behavior. You can help others assist you by

telling them how you want to change your behavior and how they can help.

So far we've been talking about receiving feedback, but giving feedback is also a skill worth practicing. It's often difficult to tell someone you disapprove of an action or statement. Sometimes we think people will misunderstand our comments, become angry or be embarrassed, and then we'll feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. However, unless you tell people you're bothered by what they say or do, they may assume that you approve. You can make your negative feedback more effective and more acceptable by doing some of the following things. It helps if you send negative feedback messages immediately after the behavior occurs. When you do that, describe the specific behaviors which upset you. You can also ask questions to insure that the person understands why you want the behavior changed. It may help if you explain how the behavior makes you feel. It's also helpful if you focus the discussion on the person's behavior rather than the person. And lastly it's important to describe how you want others to change their behavior. Let them know how you would like them to act so you can discuss if this is a fair request.

After you've explained how you feel, you might want to thank the other person for listening. This helps make it clear that you are trying to be helpful and are making suggestions for improvement rather than trying to put the person down.

Giving feedback doesn't always have to mean negative feedback. When you tell people that you like something they did and want them to continue it, you are sending positive feedback. Often people express approval in a few words by saying "That's really great" or "You're doing very well." Sometimes positive feedback is expressed nonverbally by smiling or nodding. It's helpful if you describe the specific behaviors when you send positive feedback. Then the other person knows the exact statement or action which pleased you.

## NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

***If possible, have someone make a tape recording in which someone makes a mistake in asking for feedback. Identify what the person did wrong. Make a list on the board of things the person could have done to improve.

***Role play a situation in which you ask an instructor, parent or another student for feedback. Try to use the techniques mentioned above.

***Practice a situation in which you ask someone to treat you differently in relation to your disability. Let them know why you're asking them to change.

***Think about how you feel giving negative feedback. Describe two situations, one in which you were reluctant to give someone negative feedback and one in which you gave negative feedback easily. Compare the two situations--was it the person or the situation that made one easier than the other?

***Describe a situation (talking to a professor, interviewing for a job, discussing a family problem) in which you sent, requested or responded to feedback. Explain how you felt about this situation, and how the other person responded.

***List three phrases you'd feel comfortable using to respond to positive feedback. In other words, practice accepting a compliment.

***Describe a class in which an instructor sent positive feedback. Was it verbal or nonverbal? How is positive feedback helpful when you make a comment in class? How is it helpful when you're talking to other people?

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Characters in TV commercials frequently give each other positive and negative feedback. Watch a commercial during the next week and write down examples of negative feedback ("Bob, your shirt has ring around the collar") and of positive feedback ("I love you because you use_____"). Be sure to point out the nonverbal forms of positive and negative feedback. Why do advertisers use negative and positive feedback to sell their products?

2. Look for an opportunity either to request, send or receive feedback during the next week. Notice how the feedback changes the situation.

3. Keep a log during a class indicating how an instructor gives positive and negative feedback. Compare the quantity and quality of your instructor's feedback with someone else who did it. Think of ways that your professors could improve their feedback technique.

4. Watch for a situation in which you receive positive or negative feedback as a result of your disability. How do you handle the situation?

5. See if a situation occurs during the week at home or in school in which you are reluctant to send feedback. Do you find that it's easier for you to send one type of feedback--positive or negative? Why were you reluctant? How did you handle the situation?

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

- I don't even remember how it started. But I have a friend who used to carry my tray for me every day at lunchtime. And it bothered me, but it didn't seem worth making a big thing of. So I didn't say anything. Then one day I got in line with her and said I'd get my own tray. When we sat down I explained that when she got my tray I felt like she was treating me like a cripple. She was surprised. She said she just always thought of us as doing different things--me saving us space at the table while she went and got the food. I suppose you could look at it that way. But I wanted to get in line just like everyone else.

- When I was a member of this group that met during vacation I started taking the bus by myself for the first time. I was really proud of that. I suppose it's silly because I'm no baby, I'm eighteen. But I had just always gotten rides with my family or a friend. Then on about the third day it rained. It wasn't really heavy, but the way my parents acted you would have thought we were having a hurricane. They insisted I couldn't take the bus. And I was really mad at them for trying to ruin something that had been so good. Then I realized they weren't purposely trying to ruin it. They really were concerned. Plus me becoming more independent meant they had to let go of me a little more. But I didn't scream back at them all the things I usually say like, "You don't trust me. You don't think I'm capable, but I'm not your little baby anymore." I just went into the bathroom, got into the shower, and then went back into the kitchen where they were sitting, acting as if it were the end of the world. "See," I said, "I'm all wet and I can still get around O.K." They looked at me like I was crazy. But then they started laughing and that was it. I took the bus.

- Last year I moved into my own apartment. It didn't work out. I know now that one of the mistakes I made was to stay too close to home. My mother came over all the time to check on me. I might as well have been upstairs in my bedroom. I'm back home now. But I'm going to try it again next year. I learned a lot. Like when you're on your own you don't go running home to do your laundry. That's only asking for trouble. And it's not worth it, even if you save the couple of quarters you would have spent at a laundromat.

Suggested Questions

1. All of the comments deal with how to tell someone when they're being overly protective of you. But how do you let someone know when you need their help?

2. Do you think it's important to have an apartment of your own. Why? If your parents objected or made it difficult for you after you moved into your own apartment, how might you ask for or give feedback to help reconcile things?

## ELIZABETH J. BUCHANAN

### Not Dumb . . . Dyslexic

Elizabeth J. Buchanan was the only person interviewed for this book who isn't working full time. Yet getting in touch with her was harder than with anyone else. She's a student at Nassau Community College. Beth began her semester by signing up for sixteen credits, auditing one class, driving a van eight hours a week for the Office for Disabled Students, babysitting two nights a week, waitressing on the weekends, and helping twice a week with the patterning of a young brain damaged child.

We sat in the cafeteria on campus while Beth talked about finding out two years ago that she has dyslexia. She was working full time as an assistant teacher in a preschool program and teaching arts and crafts at a community center on Long Island. She had decided to take a Spanish class since her boyfriend was a native speaker. She had so much trouble learning the language, despite all the studying she was doing, that she decided it must be her hearing. As a child Beth had frequent tutoring because of a hearing impairment. Her hearing eventually returned, leaving her with only a minimal loss. But throughout her school years there was an obvious gap between her intense class participation and her poor test scores. The problem was actually with anything that involved reading and writing. It was a gap that also frustrated her teachers, who would sometimes accuse her of being lazy or not concentrating. It was such a shock for them to see their star pupil (who often helped others with their work) flunk a test or hand in an incomprehensible report. Yet both she and her teachers believed that her difficulties must be because of her poor hearing.

Beth resented being told in high school that she "wasn't college material." But she had always known she enjoyed working with people. So when she finished high school she entered a pediatric nursing program sponsored by The New York Foundling Hospital and became certified in early childhood development (pediatrics nursing). Because of the closing of many hospital nurseries in the early 1970's, Beth was unable to get a nursing job and instead worked as an assistant teacher. She enjoyed her job and would have been satisfied with it if it weren't for the fact that her salary was low because of her lack of a college degree. But she hesitated to return to school, remembering the admonition that she wasn't capable of college.

Learning a language didn't seem as intimidating as going to college full time. So Beth went to school to learn Spanish. When she started having problems learning, she decided to have her hearing tested. The tests didn't show anything. But a friend studying about dyslexia suggested she go to a clinic and get tested for that.

"I was relieved when I found out I had dyslexia," Beth said. "It meant I wasn't dumb. All of a sudden, instead of reprimanding me, everyone was complimenting me, saying I had done so well."

Beth returned to school full time a year ago. Knowing she had dyslexia was a relief. But it also meant a lot of hard work. Beth gets her books on tape, and

works regularly with tutors from the college's Office for Disabled Students. It's very time consuming. And Beth says, "Sometimes I resent all the things I've had to give up--concerts, working on my art, skiing . . . ." Going back to school has also meant cutting back on traveling and eating out, as Beth scrapes together her expenses every semester from OVR, loans, and part-time jobs.

"I did all this automatic compensating through the years. I don't take good notes so I draw. Biology is great for that. I passed my whole anatomy final at the Foundling Hospital by drawing." For the first time Beth began to look at her ways of compensating for her learning disability. She writes rather than prints whenever possible, hoping her spelling mistakes will just be taken for loops or other parts of her handwriting. She saw that the tendency she has of throwing herself into projects, that often results in her being chosen as a leader, is a way she has of proving to herself that she <u>is</u> competent.

Her first semester at college, Beth joined the disabled students' group. She was very active in it the first year, but has had to pull back recently because of her studies. "I always think of myself as partially hard of hearing so I guess I relate to the deaf more. But I've learned a lot: I never realized it bothered someone in a wheelchair when people run in front of them to open the door. But I think the difference is more in them being eighteen and me being twenty-eight than it is in our different disabilities. Their main concern seems to be meeting people and having dates. I've never had trouble meeting people.

"Sometimes I look around a classroom and feel so old. But if it takes ten years, I'll take ten years. The important thing is not to put so many demands on yourself that you begin to feel inferior. There are no tips with learning disabilities

because everyone's different. I have a friend with dyslexia whose learning needs are almost completely different from mine. The only thing I can say is if you get to the point where you're ready to pull your hair out, go ahead. It'll grow back."

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you think someone with dyslexia would need any changes in job responsibilities? Are there some jobs that would be especially difficult to handle?

2. Do you ever feel a gap between yourself and others with different disabilities? Why do you think that ?

3. Have you ever been unfairly discouraged from going on in your education because of your disability?

Do you know about the independent living center in your area? You may want to get on their mailing list, or offer to write an article for their newsletter. Below is a description of the centers, and addresses for the ones in New York State.

## FACT SHEET
## INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS

PURPOSE

Throughout the U.S., independent living centers have been organized to aid physically disabled people in moving toward more self reliant existences. In New York State, The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has provided funding for the establishment of nine independent living centers.

A basic tenet of the independent living movement is that all people, regardless of the severity of their disability, are entitled to make choices with respect to their lifestyle. Personal and community attitudes, architectural barriers, transportation and other technical constraints unite to isolate people with physical disabilities.

SERVICES

Independent living centers, governed and staffed by disabled individuals, offer unique, non-residential support services. Examples of services offered by many of the centers in New York State include:

Intake counseling to determine an individual's need for services that facilitate independent living

Referrals and counseling services with respect to attendant care

Advocacy services concerning legal and economic rights and benefits

Peer Counseling

Independent Living Skills: training in the maintenance of necessary equipment, training in job seeking skills, counseling and therapy needs and programs, and special skill training specific to an individual's disability and living situation

Housing and Transportation referral and assistance

Education and Training necessary for living in the community and participating in community activities

Interpreter Services

Design and Modification of structures to insure accessibility

## INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS IN NEW YORK STATE

ARISE INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER
(Alternatives for Reaching Independence through Services and Engineering)
C/O United Cerebral Palsy Association
Syracuse, New York 13208
(315) 455-6651

ALLIED RESOURCES CENTER FOR THE HANDICAPPED
1506 Whitesboro Street
Utica, New York 13502
(315) 797-4642

CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED
853 Broadway, Room 611
New York, New York 10003
(212) 674-2300

CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE
10 Colvin Avenue
Albany, New York 12206
(518) 459-6422

HANDICAPPED INDEPENDENCE H.E.R.E.
1400 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York 14620
(716) 275-0250

INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR THE HANDICAPPED
408 Jay Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201
(212) 625-7500

LONG ISLAND CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
3601 Hempstead Turnpike
Levittown, New York 11756
(516) 796-0144

WESTCHESTER COUNTY INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER
Westchester County Office for the Disabled
County Office Building
White Plains, New York 10601
(914) 682-3062

WESTERN NEW YORK INDEPENDENT LIVING PROJECT
3108 Main Street
Buffalo, New York 14214
(716) 838-6904

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

There isn't a lot more to say about the topic of feedback. New York City's Mayor Ed Koch became well-known for his greeting to strangers he'd pass on the street or at political meetings: "How am I doing?" Truth is, he often didn't wait for the answer and probably wouldn't welcome negative feedback. But in essence, feedback is asking people: "How am I doing?" "How do I affect you?" And telling them: This is how you affect me. If we all did more of it--tactfully but honestly--human relations would almost surely improve.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# ASSERTING YOURSELF

Have you ever seen someone scream at a clerk or a waitress? Usually to those people sitting nearby the anger seemed to have come out of nowhere. Some people confuse aggressive behavior with assertive behavior. But being assertive doesn't mean screaming at every person you see. All of us encounter blocks--another person's actions or words prevent us from saying or doing what we want. When we are blocked we can behave in a couple of different ways. We can give up, scream and insist the whole world is against us, or try to find a new way to reach our objectives.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll be discussing the difference between acting passively, aggressively, and assertively; as well as four techniques for becoming more assertive.

## TO GET STARTED

Mike Bohan (see the interview at the end of this chapter) mentioned his experience with the staff of the college radio station who didn't want blind students working there. Though accessibility is usually thought of in terms of ramps and bus lifts, it's also open doorways to opportunities. Often we aren't just handed things; we have to ask for them. Think of a situation that requires assertiveness that particularly concerns you, such as getting an interpreter, traveling, finding a reader, or changing your major. Have a volunteer write the situations on the board. Then as a group decide on one that will be acted out.

***After the situation has been acted out, decide if the ending was an example of passive, assertive or aggressive behavior. Have members of the group suggest alternative endings. Which of the alternatives would you be comfortable with? It will help you get a feel for them if each alternative is briefly dramatized and then labeled as passive, assertive or aggressive.

***Were any of the situations listed on the board related to disabilities? How did the scenes compare with some of your own experiences that involved your disability?

When we were field testing this book a student said that disabled people are less apt to be assertive since they need others' help and can't afford to offend anyone. What do you think of that opinion? Which of the three ways of reacting -- passive, assertive, or aggressive--do you tend to use most often?

## TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

***Sometimes people have trouble behaving assertively because they aren't sure how it's different from acting aggressively. Find a partner for this exercise. In order to make the difference clear, practice saying the same things passively, assertively and aggressively. Your partner will help by letting you know if your comment is on target. The leader will check in with the different couples to listen to you.

***Role play a situation where a student is dissatisfied with the grade on a report and wants to tell the instructor so in an assertive manner.

***What are some of the different ways you can be assertive? As a group try to come up with some techniques that can be used in a conversation that would help you become assertive.

***Now role play a situation where you are trying to be assertive when discussing something with your parents. How does this compare with the earlier conversation involving an instructor?

***Describe a situation in which someone was aggressive when talking to you. How did you feel? How did you react? Try a skit where you practice handling it differently.

***Describe a situation in which you were passive. For example, maybe you wanted to question a grade you were given, exchange a gift, or say no to what you felt was an unfair demand. How did you feel about yourself? How did you feel about the other person? Find a partner to practice a more assertive approach.

***Explain the difference between being polite and being passive. Is there a difference?

***Compare the self-image projected by people using assertive, aggressive and passive behavior. Which self-image would you like to project?

**TO IMPROVE**

Before we discuss some techniques to help you become more assertive, it's important that we agree on exactly what assertive behavior is. One way to do this is to compare it with passive behavior and aggressive behavior. People who behave passively do not tell others what they think or feel. Often they express their opinions or emotions indirectly. They assume that the other person will understand what they really mean and will help them reach their goal. For example, Bill is standing in a bank line when a stranger moves in front of him. Bill is angry and wants to tell the person to go to the end of the line. He assumes that the woman will understand his behavior and comply with his wishes if he frowns and sighs loudly. At the other extreme there are the people who seem to be itching for a fight. This kind of people are frequently described as having a chip on their shoulder. Frequently aggressive people demand that others comply with their wishes. They often do that while putting down others. Bill would have been acting aggressively if he said, "You idiot, don't you see I'm ahead of you? Go to the back of the line where you belong." On the other hand, assertiveness is a direct expression of one's own feelings, thoughts, and opinions. People who behave this

way stand up for their rights in a non-hostile (non-aggressive) way. Although they are not afraid to make reasonable demands, the opinions, thoughts, and feelings of others are also respected. Bill would have been acting assertively if he had said, "Excuse me, you probably didn't see me standing in front of you, but there is a line here and you should be at the end of it."

There are four things you can do to be more assertive. They are asking why, telling about yourself, handling a mistake, and selling your ideas. The next few pages describe these techniques.

Assertive behavior is based on the assumption that although you have the right to make requests, others have the right to refuse them. So, people who act assertively respect the feelings of others. Yet there are sometimes situations in which you feel the need to ask why, maybe because someone canceled a date or a supervisor changed your job responsibilities. Neither extreme--spending hours trying to imagine the person's reason, or immediately jumping into a fight--is very effective. Instead, by using assertive behavior, you would explain that you are interested in why there is a change. You might want to make a point of requesting time in private with the person. That way neither of you would have to be concerned about the whole cafeteria or office following your conversation. It also gives the other person an opportunity to prepare. The other person may have canceled a date with you because of a need to study or work. So instead of assuming it was because you were by far the ugliest person on earth you can ask why the change of mind about the date. It may help if you think about the possible reasons before the conversation. Perhaps you chose an activity that the person felt was too expensive but was embarrassed to say that. Or maybe there was some concern about your disability. Or maybe it's as simple as the person having to work. There are many possible reasons. The important thing is to find out the reason. You can say something like, "You know, after you cancelled the date I

started wondering why. Could you meet me tomorrow so we can talk?"

At work you may have your responsibilities changed and find yourself wondering why. You could react by finding out what the gossip around the office is, starting to look for a new job, or filing a discrimination suit. Or you could ask for ten minutes of your supervisor's time. At the meeting with your supervisor don't begin by apologizing or telling how hard you work. You can simply start by saying something like, "It was never explained to me why my job was changed. So I asked to meet with you to find out."

Talking about yourself is another way of acting assertively. You can strengthen your position by discussing relevant personal experiences that support your argument. By talking about your thoughts and feelings you demonstrate a willingness to take responsibility for your position. At work your experiences from a past job or from friends' jobs may be helpful. Two extremes are to be avoided: at one extreme is not saying anything unless you are directly asked, and at the other extreme is interrupting everyone as you push your stories on them. If you present your experience briefly you can then judge other people's reactions as to whether you should say more.

A third way of acting assertively is in the way you handle mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes, but how you handle a mistake once it has happened will tell a lot about you. Here is a dialogue about a situation at work. It's about a recent graduate named Vicki who works as a secretary for an advertising agency. Vicki's leg was amputated when she was a teenager. She wears an artificial leg, and it's sometimes difficult for her to walk long distances. Her boss, Mr. Cambridge, asked Vicki to mail a brochure to a potential client describing the agency's services. Vicki didn't mail the brochure until three days later. When she received the mail receipt, she noticed that the brochure had been sent third class because she hadn't marked it first class. It is now two weeks

later; the client just told Mr. Cambridge that she hadn't received the brochure.

| | |
|---|---|
| Cambridge: | Vicki, do you remember that brochure I asked you to mail to Miss Manuel? I spoke to her today and she still hasn't gotten it. |
| Vicki: | She must be mistaken. I know I mailed it. |
| Cambridge: | If you mailed it, why hasn't she received it? |
| Vicki: | Maybe her secretary lost it. You know things like that happen. |
| Cambridge: | She told me she asked her secretary about the brochure. As of today, it still hasn't arrived. |
| Vicki: | Maybe the mailroom messed up again. You know you can't trust them--most of those people are only part-time. |
| Cambridge: | Usually they do a pretty good job. I don't think the mailroom caused the delay. |
| Vicki: | Well, I was looking through the mail receipts and I didn't see a first class mail receipt. |
| Cambridge: | Why didn't you tell me this before? |
| Vicki: | I . . . I only saw the receipts today. I'm . . . I'm pretty sure that I mailed it. But I found a receipt for a third class package. |
| Cambridge: | Third class! No wonder it's so late in arriving! But if the mailroom sent it third class, it still should have been there days ago. Why would they send it third class anyway? |
| Vicki: | I don't know. This isn't the first time that they've made this mistake. |
| Cambridge: | Don't you check on them? |
| Vicki: | I do as well as I can, but I'm sure you realize how difficult it is for me to get around. I really can't take each piece of mail up myself. |
| Cambridge: | I'm sorry I forgot. But we must figure out a better system. |

Vicki needs to learn to handle mistakes better. She began by blaming everybody but herself, and she ended by using her disability as an excuse and maybe as a way to get sympathy.

Certainly we all do things like that occasionally, but as a rule, people find that in the long run situations are handled better by a frank statement such as "Let me check and see what happened" or "I did send it but it was third class--was that a mistake?" or "It's a little difficult for me to get around but if the mailroom has to be checked up on, I'll have to find some way to do it."

The last technique we want to talk about is presenting your ideas to others. Selling your ideas is a real part of being in the work world no matter where you

work. As you gain experience you'll become better at it. But something many people have difficulty with, even people with many years of experience, is realizing that you don't have to knock the other person to build yourself up. Although there are some exceptions, in most companies work is not a seesaw where in order to have yourself and your ideas on top you have to push others to the bottom. This isn't to say that you should naively assume that your supervisors will automatically see the good work you do. It's important to document your work. And we aren't saying you won't face any competition. Most jobs have their share of office politics. But exactly because of that you have to learn to present ideas and projects the best you can. By talking to others in your field, you can get an idea of what is expected. Sometimes colleges invite visiting professionals who speak to student groups about their fields. This is a good way to find out how others present their projects and ideas, at the same time that you learn more about the occupations themselves. Often those in entry level jobs are expected to do much of the work and get little acknowledgement. By talking to others you can find out if it's standard procedure for your boss to ask you to write up a letter or report and then sign her name, or take credit for your projects in other ways. Some things can be chalked up to getting experience. Other times you may decide it's time to take a stand, or consider leaving. And this too would be an important part of selling your ideas--knowing when you're getting necessary experience and when you're being taken advantage of and should move on.

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

Set up a role play for each of the following situations. In each case you might want to have two or more people try handling the situation and then discuss their approaches:

***An instructor gives you a major homework assignment that doesn't seem to relate at all to that course. Try asking why.

***You are being interviewed for a job as a (you choose the occupation). The interviewer seems to doubt that you have enough background for that job. Tell about yourself in such a way that you think would help persuade the interviewer that you are qualified.

***Your supervisor on your summer job has just discovered an error you made. Try to handle the mistake in the best way you can.

***In a club meeting you think you have a good idea to solve a particular problem, but the other people present don't seem to like the idea at first. Try to sell your idea to them.

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Try to use assertive behavior in a situation where you think it is appropriate. Be ready at the next meeting of the group to explain how you felt in the situation.

2. Watch for a situation that happens during the week in which you act either aggressively or passively. Note how you feel while doing it and how you feel afterward. What got in the way of your being assertive? If there is an encounter during the week when someone acts passively or aggressively to you, how do you respond to this person?

3. Often on TV shows--especially soap operas--the story is based on the conflict between a character who acts passively and one who acts aggressively. Watch a TV show and describe characters who act both passively and aggressively. Then explain how their behaviors affected the plot. How would the plot have been changed if one or both of the characters acted assertively?

4. Try the exercise on the next page with a partner. In a few phrases write how you would handle the situations mentioned. Then say it out loud and mark whether it was passive, assertive, or aggressive. What does your friend think?

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

- You have to be twice as good as everyone else when you're disabled. From the very beginning you have to prove yourself in everything you do. So if you make a mistake you really can't admit it.

- I think I'm more assertive than most people. Everything that I've gotten I've had to work very hard for. So when someone says, "No," I don't leave. I just think of it as a beginning, like you know what I want and now I know your opinion, so let's sit down and talk about it. Everything is open to discussion.

- I have to keep reminding myself that things are negotiable. Sometimes I feel so powerless. My parents are setting down rules at home, then I go to school and am told what classes I have to take, then at work all the full-time workers tell me what to do. I have to keep reminding myself this is my life.

<u>Suggested Discussion Questions</u>

1. In your own experience have you found that the first statement above is true for you?

2. Do you think that disabled people as a whole are more or less assertive than nondisabled people? Why do you think that is?

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IN THESE SITUATIONS?

Find a partner to practice acting out the three situations listed below. Then write in the chart whether it was handled passively, aggressively or assertively. Have your partner also rate your behavior.

| THE SITUATION | THE WORDS YOU WOULD USE | WAS IT HANDLED PASSIVELY, ASSERTIVELY, OR AGGRESSIVELY |
|---|---|---|
| Changing a class | | My opinion:<br>My partner's: |
| Calling about a job opening | | My opinion:<br>My partner's: |
| (Write in a situation you're concerned about) | | My opinion:<br>My partner's: |

**HOW THEY DID IT**

## MICHAEL BOHAN

### "You Just Have to Be Assertive"

Michael Bohan is the chief engineer at In-Touch Networks, an FM subchannel broadcaster in Manhattan. He talked about his decision to go into the field of radio broadcasting, while sitting in a small room next to the control booth. He occasionally left to sit behind the control panel that's so full of switches and buttons that it looks overpowering to an outsider. He did this with the same matter-of-fact attitude that he has when he talks about the times he had to fight for what he wanted.

Now in his late twenties Michael was born the second of seven children. He says his parents never treated him differently because of his blindness. He went to Lavelle School for the Blind in the Bronx where he learned braille and the other specific skills he needed. But looking back now he would have preferred to go to a regular high school instead of the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind. "It was too structured. It's a sighted world. By the time you're in your teens it's time to start mingling in the world."

Though Michael says getting the job you want is a matter of being in the right place at the right time, he didn't leave it all to chance. As a teenager he hung around WOR-FM, a rock station, every weekend. "I'm sure I was a pain in the ass. But they were too kind to say that. They never really outright told me I shouldn't come back. So I kept going."

"It was the behind the scenes aspect that fascinated me. I'm not really interested in getting on the air," he said. With this interest he decided to go to C.W. Post College and major in communication. He was surprised to see how closed-minded the staff of the college radio station was. "They didn't like blind

students handling the technical equipment." This experience plus his own impatience to get some hands-on knowledge caused him to quit college after two years. "For what I wanted to do I didn't think I needed all the courses they required like advertising and announcing."

In 1974 he moved to Virginia and worked as the assistant manager of a campground. He found it frustrating to be in an area where public transportation was so limited that he had to depend on others for rides. So he moved back to New York. What followed were jobs as a messenger, a salesman for cable TV, and a braille transcriber.

Michael heard about In-Touch Network and started volunteering there. "I found I was too busy in the beginning to be nervous. I spent a couple of mornings watching and before I knew it I was just doing it. I was very fortunate to have gotten in at the ground level. They had just gone on the air the week before I started. And though I was volunteering I didn't think I had anything to lose. A counselor at the Commission for the Blind wanted me to work in a sheltered workshop. At least at the radio station I was getting experience."

He makes it sound so easy, as if there weren't any problems. But questioned further, he mentions the lack of support. "After about seven months of volunteering we approached the Commission for OJT (on-the-job training) money. My counselor said no right away. She still wanted me to go into a sheltered workshop. I know people who have master's and they're being told they should take a job making brooms. So I talked to my boss. We agreed he'd call my counselor's supervisor. They weren't even on the phone thirty seconds and he agreed." What was agreed upon was that Mike would get a stipend of $150 a week. The Commission would pay it fully for six months, and then split it with the radio station for three more months.

Michael is responsible for supervising the technical preparation of all

programming for his station. He especially enjoys producing theatrical presentations. "It's very challenging. I mix voices and music and special effects, and then edit it. I like the creativity of it. Now when I listen to another station I find myself focusing in on the quality of a recording. Sometimes I hear something that's abominable, and I don't know how they could let it go on the air." He says he enjoys the pressure in his job. Often his job, which also requires concentration and dexterity, requires the completion of a tape within a limited amount of time. Knobs and levers on all the machines have been labeled in braille. And he also uses a device that emits an audible sound instead of a visual display.

Michael recently sent out 90 resumes to area radio stations. He feels that with his three years of experience it's time to move on to a larger station, preferably a union one. He's been studying for the kind of license required at a union station-- a first-class broadcast engineer's license. There's a separate test for people who are blind, from which the drawings have been eliminated. Besides studying for the test, he's spending time following up on his resumes. "Even when someone writes back to say there aren't any openings I think it's definitely good to follow-up with a phone call. You can better place yourself in their mind that way. You just have to be assertive in getting experience, and looking for a job."

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Were you at all surprised that a blind person could handle a job like this? If you were in a situation like Michael's, do you think you would have been as persistent and assertive as he was?

2. Did the question ever come up in your family about segregated schooling because of your handicap? If so, how was it resolved? What is your opinion now about separate schools or separate classes for people with disabilities?

3. Have you thought about how you will break into your field to get a first job and later jobs? How do you think you'll approach that? Does your field require any kind of licensing?

## THE IDEA CORNER

In-Touch Networks has a taped set of a conference they held entitled, "The Assertive Job Seeker." It was sponsored by the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. The six half-hour sessions are available on three reels or in three cassettes and cost $9.00. The tapes cover:

I. GENERAL JOBSEEKING METHODS

Bernard Posner, President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped
Richard N. Bolles, Author, What Color is your Parachute?
William Cantor, Cantor Concerns, Executive Consultant Firm

II. ASSERTION, GENERAL AND SPECIFICS

Janice Larouche, The New School for Social Research
Dr. Abe Eisenberg, Author, Jobtalk
Arlene Gordon, The Lighthouse

III. CORPORATE AWARENESS

Eileen Donahue, New York Telephone Company
Jim Radciewicz, American Express Company
Mary McRae, ICD Rehabilitation and Training Center

IV. CORPORATE ACHIEVERS

Paul Scher, Sears, Roebuck & Company
Harold Goldenstein, Sally Gee Fashions

V. SUPPORTIVE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Ramona Walhof, National Federation of the Blind
Catherine Dighton, Mainstream
Dr. Betty Bird, National Public Radio

VI. TECHNICAL AIDS

Karen Luxton, Computer Center, Baruch College, CUNY
Henry B. Stern, American Foundation for the Blind
Gerald Miller, New York State Commission for the Blind

In-Touch Networks, Inc. is located at 322 West 48th Street, New York, New York 10036, (212) 586-5588.

You may find that by becoming more knowledgeable about laws you can be more assertive about your rights. An excellent book on accessibility is Barrier Free Design: The Law available from Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, 432 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Terry Moakley (interviewed in Chapter Three) wrote it.

The Theatre Development Fund (TDF) in New York City has a theatre access project which was started two years ago. They offer disabled people tickets to Broadway and off-Broadway theatre, dance, and music events. Their service includes a list of show offerings, tickets mailed in advance, phone orders for the blind, a play synopsis, and a theatre seating plan. They offer approximately four shows every month that are covered by their services, as well as one show a month that has a sign language interpreter. To get on their mailing list, write Theatre Access Project, TDF, 1501 Broadway, New York, New York 10036.

One way you can become more assertive is by becoming knowledgeable about any aids you use. It may be something like learning the maintenance procedures for a hearing aid or wheelchair. Or you may take medication and will want to know if there are any side effects and what you can do in the way of preventative health care to deal with it. For those who use a wheelchair, a helpful guide is Wheelchair Maintenance for the Non-Mechanical Consumer developed by ARCH, 1506 Whiteboro Street, Utica, New York 13502. Another book which is helpful lists over seven hundred pages of daily living aids. It's called Aids to Independent Living by Edward Lowman and Judith Klinger (McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York).

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

This has become an era of assertiveness training. Workshops on assertiveness for women, minorities, disabled, and many other groups are available almost everywhere and almost all the time. This suggests that many people feel some inadequacy in standing up for their rights. It may also suggest that our increasing sensitivity to human relations matters has made us aware that aggressiveness is not the answer, even though we've seen more of it. If enough of us develop the assertiveness skills, maybe future generations will learn it just by observation and imitation during their normal growing-up experiences, and then the special training won't be needed so much.

# CHAPTER EIGHT
# RESOLVING CONFLICTS

Have you ever watched a soap opera and felt like shaking the characters into making sense? There are so many conflicts. You may have sat in front of the T.V. and said, "They're acting ridiculous. Myrna should just tell Harvey that the baby isn't his and then he can tell Lucille that before his amnesia and after the plastic surgery he lived in Libertyville where . . . ." Of course it's the conflicts, as predictable as they may be, that keep us watching. But our real lives aren't T.V. shows. And many of us would gladly do without some of the conflicts we now have.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll be discussing the tips that should help you better handle conflicts. Of course, there are no easy answers. But sometimes we start talking about things that aren't related to the conflict. Or we decide there's no way we're going to compromise, or we begin to take the other person's comments personally. And when those things happen it's very hard to get anything settled.

## TO GET STARTED

Imagine that next week is spring vacation. All semester you've been looking forward to going camping with a group of your friends. But the last month you've been having some seizures and your parents insist you should cancel the trip and go see the doctor. You feel concerned, too. But you think the seizures were just because you didn't take your medication on time. You try to explain that to them. But as you do they say that camping isn't good for you anyway, you'll probably get a cold or get a backache. Before you know it both of you are repeating the same old things that always get dragged up at arguments.

***Have three volunteers act out this situation. Afterwards ask the participants to discuss how they felt in their roles. Discuss any ideas the group has for handling the conflict.

***Now have three more volunteers try the situation again. This time they should try some of the suggestions from the group. How was it different from the first time? Find out from the volunteers how they felt.

***Have you dealt with a conflict at school that you felt worked out well? Break up into groups of two to four and have each person tell the other of their experience. Then try to come up with a list of the key factors that made for successful conflict resolution.

***What kinds of problems do you think you'll have at work with the people around you? You may want to act out the situation with a partner.

***Have two people role play a conflict situation that has occurred on somebody's job. Then discuss the way it was handled and could be handled. You may also want to break up into pairs and each pair role play a work conflict.

## TO IMPROVE

When there's a conflict some people retreat completely and others become inflexible. Though something very important to you may be at stake, it's important to try to keep yourself open to communication. It will if you'll try to cool down

any angry or anxious feelings so you can focus your attention on the problem, try to understand the problem and suggest solutions, and cooperate with others to find a compromise solution.

One of the first things you should do is define the problem. When people discuss problems they usually assume that they're talking about the same issues. However, because everyone has different experiences, problems are often perceived differently. So before you spend hours discussing different things you can simply say something like, "Let's make sure we have the same concern. What is it that you see as the problem here?" Or you could say, "I would like . . . but you seem to want . . . am I correct in outlining our disagreement?"

If you were correct, then you can move on to the next step of comparing areas of agreement and disagreement. If you're in a more formal environment such as work you may want to list the areas of disagreement so the different perceptions of the situation can be covered.

Now that you know exactly in what ways you disagree, it's often helpful to discuss possible compromise solutions. Though you may be tempted to think that it's either all or none, now is the time to decide exactly what's important to you. In resolving conflicts it's necessary for both people to make concessions. Because some issues are more important than others, each of you must decide which points you feel strongly about and which you're willing to let slide. Often it will save time if you'll let the other person know the one or two points most important to you. There are seldom simple solutions to disagreements. Before a workable compromise can be found, a lot of discussion must occur. Although you may be tempted at this point to just agree to get it over with, this usually won't work. Poorly resolved problems will usually come up again and again. As you're trying to come up with a compromise, it will help if you'll listen closely and try to put yourself in the other person's place. When it's your turn to talk, explain why you feel so strongly about your opinions, describing the experience that resulted in your

opinion.

The fourth and last thing to do is agree on a compromise solution. In addition, it's often helpful if you summarize the solution. During the summary people can bring up questions they don't understand as well as plan their future course of action. And remember too that there's the possibility that the course of action decided on will be reevaluated in the future. So try not to leave the meeting thinking it's the end of the world. The only thing decided was that this is the way it will be for now.

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

**Try to use the four techniques described above in acting out a conflict with your family. Divide into groups of threes with one person watching, one being a parent, and one being a college age son or daughter. Afterwards the observer will tell what was done that was good.

***Think of a problem you face on campus where you could use the techniques discussed. Describe it to the group so you can get some people to help you act it out.

***Describe a situation in which you are currently engaged in an unresolved conflict. What are the obstacles preventing a solution of the problem? How could you remove them? It's important to make sure that what you're discussing is really conflict and not uncertainty on your part about what to do, or what decision to make.

***Do you find that you tend to avoid having conflicts with certain groups of people like instructors, sales people, parents? Do you think your disability has in any way influenced your ability to resolve conflicts?

***Imagine that because of your disability some changes were made in your job responsibilities. Now some of your co-workers have complained to the boss that it's unfair. What would you do? Try acting it out.

*** Think of a situation at work where there is a conflict. Have two volunteers act it out trying to use the techniques discussed. If you don't work now, what kinds of conflicts do you think you'll have? How could they be handled?

***How is non-verbal behavior used in resolving conflicts? Demonstrate the types of non-verbal behavior which would be most effective in resolving problems. Get two volunteers to act out the situation at work that was just role played, with special emphasis on the non-verbal behavior.

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Watch a T.V. show during the week that depicts a conflict, so that the next time the group meets you'll be able to describe the conflict, describe the alternatives the characters had for solving the problem, and discuss how the characters resolved the problem. Mention how the situation could have been improved by using the techniques for resolving conflicts discussed in this chapter.

2. Make a tape recording for the next session in which inappropriate approaches for resolving conflict are illustrated. When you bring it into the class ask them to identify the inappropriate approaches and suggest ways the speakers could use to improve.

3. Watch for a situation in which there is conflict between two or more people--yourself included. Define the problem and describe each person's behavior. What might have been better strategies for solving this problem?

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

o In order to do the things mentioned in this chapter to end a conflict you need to have some influence, and I just don't feel like I have any. When you're young and you're a student you don't have any power. Why would someone else want to compromise just because I wasn't satisfied?

o I didn't even realize it until I read this chapter, but a lot of times I've been arguing with someone and I don't think we even had the same problem in mind.

o There are certain situations where all you can do is agree to disagree. I think some things can never be settled.

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about the first person's comment that you need some power in order to resolve conflicts? Are there ways to acquire that power?

2. Have you encountered any conflicts where there really wasn't any resolution or compromise possible, and where all you could do is agree or disagree?

HOW THEY DID IT

## IRA BRODY

### Find A Need You Can Fill

Ira Brody is a freelance fund raiser. He works mainly for non-profit agencies. But if you expect him to sound like one of the brochures he writes on epilepsy, cancer, or Tay-Sachs you're going to be very surprised. "To me it's just the disease of the month," he said. "I don't have to believe one is any worse than the others to make them money. I'm going to make them money because it will make me money. Some campaigns are easier than others. Cancer is an easy word to remember, it's two syllables and it's diddley. But you take something like Tay-Sachs. . ." As Ira talked he paced around the room, reaching for a brochure, putting down a cup of coffee, and acting out things he said.

He is equally outspoken when talking about being a client at some of the agencies that he now helps raise money for. When he was released after an injury in Viet Nam that resulted in his epilepsy, Ira was surprised at the people he met in agencies. "They felt sorry for me. I had to go to therapy in order to get my disability money. And I saw that I couldn't listen to the people at the agencies who were supposed to be helping me. Because they weren't going to. They felt sorry for me, thinking I was overeducated. The last thing I needed was help from other people. I felt that I needed to be what I used to be. No one helped me before. I was the one who quarterbacked an Ivy League football team."

After growing up in Kansas, Ira went to an Ivy League university on a football scholarship. In 1964 when he graduated he went into the army. "I totally accepted

the military as the right thing to do. I grew up watching war movies where we were always in the right."

In 1968 during the first Tet Offensive he was wounded. It wasn't clear what the extent of his head injuries were. So he stayed in the hospital in Japan for three months. When he was told that he had developed epilepsy and had uncontrollable seizures he says he felt extremely lucky. "I didn't even compare it to what I had seen. . . all the arms and legs and mutilation. I thought I was really lucky. They classified me as 90% disabled! But that was O.K. If they wanted to give me money for passing out once in awhile I wasn't going to complain."

He was transferred to the Veterans Hospital in San Francisco. After seven months he checked himself out because he felt he was getting too dependent. But it took another six months for three operations of plastic surgery. The scars were severe on his face and head. And he decided that he couldn't do anything without correcting them. During that time he tried to decide what to do with his life. "I had always thought I'd graduate and then go to work for General Motors. The only problem was now I was so ugly I scared children . . . and I had epilepsy."

After Ira's plastic surgeries he made the rounds of corporations. As soon as they found out he had epilepsy they weren't interested in hiring him. At one interview he didn't mention his epilepsy and was hired immediately. But three weeks later he had his first seizure on the job and was fired. He lost a couple of other jobs after having seizures at work. "It's like a woman who's pregnant, there's only so long you can keep it a secret, eventually it's going to show. I realized I'd have to start my own business. Since that time I've had seizures in some of the best board rooms in the country. But they need me. They need what I can do. The key is that I'm helping them turn a profit. I'd hire a three eyed monster if they could sit in my office and make me money. I'd be a fool not to. Ninety percent of

the people in this country can't get beyond your handicap, and you're a fool if you don't acknowledge that. They think they're doing you a favor when they hire you."

Around this time Ira also decided he'd have to leave the west coast and go to a city that had more extensive public transportation. He moved to New York, and got a room in a Times Square hotel and tried to decide how to best use the four hundred dollars he had. He decided to start trying to get consulting accounts. Working out of the rundown hotel he hired a girl to sit in the hotel's phone booth and answer all calls by saying, "Brody Accounts International."

"I don't consider myself disabled," Ira said. "That word to me means not able. 'Handicap' doesn't bother me. I have a handicap in golf. And I also have one with my seizures." Now divorced, Ira mentioned how he handles his seizures in his social life. "When I go out I tell a date that I have epilepsy. You can tell it as a matter of sharing, of intimacy. I don't feel I have to marry another person with epilepsy. People see two handicapped people getting married and say, 'Isn't that cute?' But you don't have to see only handicapped people.

"I'm also an alcoholic. I began to drink when I started feeling sorry for myself because I was losing jobs. The more I drank the more I seized. So what I was doing was destroying myself. It's been five years now that I've been sober."

He feels that he now has a good idea what he can and can't do. "As handicapped people we have to be self-assertive. Now there are laws that we can use to our benefit, but God help you if you're bullshitting yourself. Knowing what you can do is a way of knowing what you can do."

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you think you could do what Ira Brody said in the first paragraph--work hard and with satisfaction even if you didn't believe very strongly in what you were doing?

2. Have you ever thought of going into business for yourself? How would you feel about it?

3. Think about whether you feel that a compromise solution can be worked out in all situations. Do you have any opinions, beliefs or values about which you think you'd never be willing to compromise?

**THE IDEA CORNER**

Certainly one of the major conflicts college students have today is meeting the expense of their education. Here are some steps you can take to find possible sources of support.

1. Get a clear idea of how much a year of school will cost. You may want to make up a couple of different budgets, one for living at home and one for sharing an apartment. Let yourself see your choices. But be realistic--things like gas, bus fare, or monthly utilities add up quickly and need to be included when you're estimating your expenses.

2. Discuss your plans with your rehabilitation counselor, and try to determine how much the agency will pay. This is a very difficult step so you may want to practice with a friend or teacher.

3. Your family may be able to contribute in some ways. This is a step that many students want to skip since they want so much to be independent and are aware of their parents' mixed feelings. But by sharing your concerns you may be able to show your parents how much it means to you.

4. Get an idea from the financial aid office of the college how much financial support is available. While in the office you should pick up the necessary forms for scholarships and loans.

5. Now sit down again to see if the various sources--financial aid, your family, a part-time job, OVR--covers your expenses. Usually at this point you'll have to make a compromise. You may want to talk to some recent graduates for their opinions. Though your ideal may be having

an apartment of your own, you may decide that it would be better to live at home for two years to save money. Or perhaps you feel the independence of living in an apartment or a dorm is crucial and you will choose to take out a loan knowing that a portion of your salary for the coming years will have to go to pay it back.

6. With some of these decisions made you can make up a first, second and third choice each with its own budget. Often at this point it becomes a waiting game as you wait to see if you've been accepted by the college, will receive a scholarship, and be supported by OVR. Feeling that you have choices will make the waiting a little easier.

Here are some publications that may help you. If your counselor doesn't have them , you can try the library or write directly to the publisher to find out how much they cost.

Meeting College Costs. College Scholarship Service, 888 7th Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

College Expenses At Post-Secondary Institutions, College Scholarship Service of the College Entrance Examination Board, College Board Publications Orders, Box 2815 Princeton, NJ 08504.

Don't Miss Out: The Ambitious Students' Guide to Scholarships and Loans. Octameron Associates, P.O. Box 3437, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.

You could also explore the possibility of getting aid from private organizations such as business, religious organizations, and labor unions. And don't overlook government sources such as social security and the Veterans Administration. A third approach is to get a job and let your employer send you to school. Some businesses, universities, and agencies pay for their employees' tuition.

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

As implied by one of the students quoted in this chapter, conflict almost inevitably involves power. And perhaps we have not yet paid enough attention to power as a factor in resolving conflicts. Be that as it may, our belief is that even when a struggle for power is involved, people can improve the way they resolve conflict by using the techniques discussed in this chapter--by appealing to reason, by suggesting cool analysis of the conflict, and, in effect, by trying to get the people involved in the conflict to see that they and their organization have more to gain by a resolution that satisfies everybody than by edicts or other methods that mandate a resolution that really hasn't been worked through.

# CHAPTER NINE
# THE IMPORTANT INTERVIEWS

When you go to an interview you have the opportunity to put into practice all the skills we've been working on in the earlier chapters. Even if you've never been on a job interview, there are probably other important interviews you've been on. Maybe it was an interview for a job on campus, a social service program, a specific course, or college itself. No matter what kind of interview you're most concerned about there are certain things you can do to help it go smoother.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll focus on strategies you can use to make interviewing situations more comfortable. We'll cover ways that you can prepare for the interview, how to interview confidently, and how to assess your interview.

## TO GET STARTED

You're about to go on an interview for a summer job. You're nervous because it's your first job interview. Though you tried to prepare for the interview, none of the hot shot books you've read have helped. After all, it's only a summer job. They know you're a college student just trying to make money for tuition, so there's no reason to try to convince them you'll be a steadfast employee for the rest of your life. Who wants to stay in a pickle bottling factory? So you're not concerned with wowing them as much as you want to find out if you can work a different schedule on Thursdays because of a class you're taking. What else would you want them to know? Have two volunteers role play a supervisor who's looking for college students to cover the bumper crop of pickles, and a student looking for a job to cover tuition.

***After watching the two people act out the scene described above, what advice would you give the student as to how to handle such an interview? Are there certain tips you'd recommend?

***How would you tell the pickle factory supervisor that because of your disability there are certain accommodations you'll need? Set up a role play in which you suggest that other responsibilities be substituted for a job task you're unable to perform. Have one or more pairs of students try handling the situation. Do you think this is a realistic demand? Why?

***Divide into groups of four to discuss one of the want ads listed in a later section of this chapter. After reading it, make a list of tasks that the job includes. Then divide the list into most important and less important skills. How many of these skills do you have? Within your group discuss ways you could prove to an interviewer that you have the skills.

## TO IMPROVE

An interview is a two-way street. Both you and the employer are assessing your potential to perform the job. Anxious to impress the interviewer, some people forget to evaluate the job critically. Instead of asking themselves if they would enjoy the job, they try to modify their experiences, ideas, and feelings to please

the employer. The job interview is a complex situation and there are no magic tricks that will get you through it. But there are some things you can do that will make interviewing easier.

One of the things you can do is to think about your experiences in relation to the job. It's a good way to prepare for the interview. Because many interviews will be brief, before the interview you should try to get as much information as you can. If a friend or counselor has told you about the job opening you can check with them about exactly what the position involves. Or you may know someone in a similar job at another place. They may give you more background. The whole purpose of this digging around is to think ahead of time about what technical, work-related, and communication skills are involved. Then you can review your own qualifications. Don't be discouraged if there isn't an exact match. Employers seldom find people who have the exact skills and experiences they need. What you want to do is demonstrate that you can perform the key aspects of the job. For technical skills, for example, you may have had the opportunity to learn drafting, accounting, therapy, or other such specific skills at college even if you've never held a fulltime job. Work-related skills are things like dressing appropriately, getting to work on time, and working well with others. No interviewer will ask if you dress like a slob and beat up strangers on the bus. But they will be interested in seeing how you present yourself at the interview. You may notice that the interviewer is curious about your organizational skills, or stresses that the job requires the ability to take initiative. In such a situation you could tell about an independent study project you did, or a club on campus you were active in. The third area, communication skills, is a little more vague. Throughout the interview you'll be demonstrating both your verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Communication skills are important in every job. Regardless of the type of job you have, you must speak to your co-workers and supervisors.

One other thing you may want to do before the interview is think about the impact of your disability on your job. Perhaps there will be none. But if there is, you'll be on more solid ground if you're ready to suggest either architectural or job modifications. You don't want to allow the interview to focus on architectural or job modifications. Remind the interviewer that these modifications are tools which will enhance your job performance. Emphasize your point by describing inexpensive modifications which increased your mobility at college.

You'll feel much more confident at the interview if you know something about the company where you're applying. You can ask your college counselor or librarian for assistance. They may suggest things like the firm's annual report, the industry's magazine or newsletter, or a catalogue or directory in which the organization is described. Maybe your counselor knows graduates who are working in similar jobs whom you could talk to. Or you yourself may know people who have worked at similar places. Do as much asking around as you can so that you will have some sense of what these companies are like and if you want to work with them.

Another thing you can do before the interview is prepare. Your first reaction may be, "I don't want to think about it; it'll only make me more nervous. I'll just wait until the interview and whatever happens, happens." But try to allow yourself to picture the interview--what are some of the questions that may be asked, what should you take with you, what do you want to find out? If you have trouble imagining an interview ask a friend with more experience to help you out. (Both frequently-asked questions and preparing a resume are discussed in The Idea Corner at the end of this chapter.) Some other things you may want to think about are whether you should take references with you or samples of your work. Don't worry that you'll come off as a novice if you ask what you should bring. It's completely appropriate when you're arranging the meeting to ask the employer if there are any

documents you should bring. In preparing you may also want to think about what salary range you want. And in case you're asked any illegal questions you may want to prepare some responses.

During the interview try to focus on the job rather than worrying if you're sitting the right way or giving the right answer. Now is the time to show you've prepared for the interview. If you're confident and relaxed, the employer will be more comfortable. You can use your non-verbal skills to demonstrate your interest in the job. And in discussing your experiences you'll be emphasizing your capabilities. Don't be concerned about appearing overly eager. Most interviewers are impressed by job candidates who seem excited about the possibility of working in the firm. You may want to discuss any job modification that may be necessary because of your disability. But keep the focus of the interview on what you can do for them rather than what they'll have to do for you. If it's a social service job that you are interviewing for, you could stress any insight or sensitivity that having a disability has given you. Usually the salary is brought up at the end by the interviewer, who will also mention the health plan, tuition reimbursement programs, and other benefits. Often there will be several applicants being interviewed, so you won't be told immediately if you're hired. If the employer doesn't tell you when you'll be contacted again, you should ask what will happen next. Then comes the easy part. You tell the employer you enjoyed discussing the position, and leave. Many people recommend sending a follow-up note to repeat your interest or stress a point you forgot to make. This does make your resume stand out from the others and is often appreciated by employers.

One of the main things that influences if you feel competent on a job interview is your work experience. It's hard to convince an employer you're perfect for the job when you yourself don't believe it because you haven't worked much. So part of handling job interviews better will come about as you gain experience. But

one thing you can do after an interview to improve is look back over the interview and ask yourself some questions: Did I make all the points I wanted to? How did I answer the interviewer's questions? Do I know what my duties would be? Answering these kinds of questions will help you improve in your next interview.

If you feel frustrated with a lack of job offers it may be due to your interviewing style. By doing a mock interview with your counselor you'll get some feedback. But a lack of jobs may be because of other things. You may want to rewrite your resume so that it stresses your strengths better. Or you may decide to volunteer some place to develop your background experience. But it may just be a matter of time or place. Perhaps the job opportunities in your chosen field are limited where you live and you should consider moving. Or maybe you need an advanced degree and will have to settle for a less satisfying job while you try to decide whether to go on to further schooling.

The important thing is to allow yourself to see all your choices. A helpful thing to do is keep a folder where you list the interviews you've gone on and the places you've sent resumes to. It's easy to get discouraged and think you've had seventy interviews without success. So it's always reassuring to look in your job search folder and see that you've actually gone on only four interviews. Sometimes in looking at your folder you may come up with some places you have not tried or a new direction you should explore.

**NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**

***Read the employment ads below. What technical, work-related and communication skills do you think applicants would be required to demonstrate? Would your disability affect your performance? What architectural or job modifications might you need?

Accountant

For non-profit educational organization. Degree in accounting and experience in financial analysis, tax and investments; familiarity with computerized informational systems. Salary low teens.

Accounts Payable Clerk

Knowledge of all-around office procedures. Must have experience. Good salary--will train.

Accounts Receivable

Garment industry background, application of cash on CRT, handle charge backs and credit adjustments, must be accurate and have good communication skills.

Bookkeeper

Midtown CPA firm desires experienced bookkeeper with securities experience. Starting salary $14,000 - $15,000.

Gal/Guy Friday

For large brokerage firm. You will be part of the data processing department in a lovely, friendly environment. Needed are good English skills and an aptitude for figures. You will be working on payroll and attendance, as well as answering calls from prestigious clients. Typing is a necessary skill for this position.

Gal/Guy Friday

Assist busy sales and production manager in fast-growing greeting card publishing business. Order processing, record keeping, sales and customer service. Attention to detail. Must be a good typist and handle own correspondence.

Draftsman M/F

Mechanical contracting company seeks draftsman with experience in plumbing. Must have thorough knowledge in laying out of sleeves and inserts. Immediate employment. Only those meeting these qualifications need apply. Salary commensurate with experience.

Draftsman

Experience on-site plan subdivision. Send resume and samples.

Mechanic-Assembler

Experienced with air compressors, pumps and ventilation fans. Knowledge piping, wiring and welding.

Programmer Cobol

Familiar with TI mini. Exciting project with midtown law firm. Knowledge pension helpful, but not required.

Programmer

Basic language, two plus years with Basic/Four a must. Applicant must be aggressive and maintain client responsibilities. Full benefits, salary negotiable.

Programmers

COBOL State-of-art environment insures virtually unlimited growth potential. Opportunity to develop new systems on 4300 using on-line and data base management systems for large midtown law office.

Retail

Join team building retail operation of prestige music publisher at convenient location. Counter clerk, phone orders, accurate typing, filing. Music knowledge important. $150 plus union benefits. Must be available Saturdays.

Purchasing Assistant

Required by company engaged in exporting engineering products. Exel opportunity for intelligent and methodical person. Must be able handle paperwork and follow-on on details. Prior export and/or purchasing experience an asset.

Sr. Compensation Analyst

Leading specialty insurance firm seeks person with 2-3 years training and experience in job analysis and salary administration to handle our exempt and non-exempt compensation program.

Silkscreen Printer

Tote bags, perm, Union shop, $155 start.

Social Service

Job developer for rehab fac w recovering alcoholics. Good salary/bnfts.

Social Wr.

BA bi-ling Span., exp adolescents and family, resume. To 15M.

Stripper

Printing co. needs expd Litho Strippers. Openings all shifts. Hi quality mag. work, good conds. Call for appt.

***What problems do you think you'll have when interviewing for jobs? Have someone write them on the board. Throughout the session you may find possible answers.

***Do you know your technical skills, work-related skills, and communication skills? Which would you like to improve? How? Which is most important for your field? How would you show an interviewer you have those skills? Find a partner so you can both take turns practicing showing an interviewer what your strengths are.

***Write a job description for a job you feel you're most suited for.

***Here are some situations you may want to design a role play for:

Explaining your disability to an interviewer
Not knowing the answer to an interviewer's specific question
Illustrating your skill in an area
Being asked your salary range
Dealing with a counselor who suggests limited job choices

***How would you react in these situations:

--It is impossible for you to perform one of the tasks described in the job description. Your interviewer indicates that this is one of the most important responsibilities that you would have.

--The employer tells you that you are not qualified for a job for which you are being interviewed.

--The interviewer tells you that it would be too expensive to make work facilities accessible to you.

--The interviewer has asked a question that you would prefer not to answer.

**DURING THE WEEK**

1. During the week discuss interviewing with your parents and friends. What special problems did they have in interviewing? Do you think you might get into similar situations? If so, how would you handle them?

2. Bring in some employment ads and try to define the jargon. Read the ads to the group, asking them for help with anything you could not figure out.

3. Make a tape recording simulating a job candidate answering some questions (look at The Idea Corner section for some ideas). Play it for the group and have them assess how well these questions were answered.

4. Bring in copies of annual reports, directories and other things you'd use to prepare for a job interview. Give the group a short presentation of the type of job you'd like and resources you could use to learn more about such job sites.

5. What do you think of your resume? Bring it in to the next meeting so you can get suggestions from others in the group. By using the resume critique form on the next page you should be able to get a clearer idea of how it looks to others.

## RESUME CRITIQUE FORM

Resume of _____

Rate the resume on the points shown below, scoring from a low of 1 to a high of 3 in each of the categories listed. Then score and compare your rating against the highest possible total score of 30. Write comments for each category receiving a score of less than 3.

| Item | Score 1 | 2 | 3 | How It Could Be Improved |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 **Overall appearance.** Do you want to read it? | | | | |
| 2 **Layout.** Does the resume look professional, well typed and printed, with good margins, etc.? Do key sales points stand out? | | | | |
| 3 **Length.** Could the resume tell the same story if it were shortened? | | | | |
| 4 **Relevance.** Has extraneous material been eliminated? | | | | |
| 5 **Writing Style.** Is it easy to get a picture of the applicant's qualifications? | | | | |
| 6 **Action Orientation.** Do sentences and paragraphs begin with action verbs? | | | | |
| 7 **Specificity.** Does resume avoid generalities and focus on specific information about experience, projects, products, etc.? | | | | |
| 8 **Accomplishments.** Are applicant's accomplishments and problem-solving skills emphasized? | | | | |
| 9 **Completeness.** Is all important information included? | | | | |
| 10 **Bottom Line.** How well does the resume accomplish its ultimate purpose of getting the employer to invite the applicant in for an interview? | | | | |

**Rating Point Total** _____ (Out of a maximum of 30)

What are some other ways that you would suggest to improve this resume?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Courtesy of Department of Student Development, Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York)

**STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US**

- On my resume I always mention my disability but also say that my health is excellent. I think it would be too big a shock to see me in a wheelchair without having known.

- I think epilepsy is more threatening to people than other disabilities. Seizures really seem to scare people. And the fact that I look like everyone else and then act so differently is real upsetting to others. I don't know if I'll ever make it past the interview.

- If one more person says I need more experience before they'll hire me I'm going to hit them over the head with my diploma. How can I get experience when I've spent all my life being a student? Working and being a student are completely different.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you think there are any similarities between working and being a student? Are there any skills you learned in school that can help you in a job?

2. Would you put your disability on your resume? Why?

**HOW THEY DID IT**

## CHRISTOPHER BARLOW

### Like Everyone Else

Christopher Barlow was excited about the upcoming playoffs of his softball team on the day I met him. He came into the apartment a little late after going through the regular battle that all city dwellers face--trying to find a parking place. Once we began our conversation I learned that Chris works as a medical technologist at Centralized Laboratory Services in Long Island City. This private laboratory provides testing services to doctors and clinics in the area. Chris works the night shift and enjoys the non-stop pace of the lab.

Chris described the experiences that led to his present position. He grew up in New York the oldest of four children. At the age of three he started at JHS 478, a public school for deaf children in Manhattan. As a teenager he transferred to a private school, Lexington School for the Deaf, before beginning college at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. After the two-year program at NTID he stayed in Rochester and worked as a lab technician. But he wasn't satisfied. He decided he needed more education and a larger city to live in, so he enrolled in Gallaudet College and majored in biology.

He mentioned Deacon Russo of Cabrini Hospital who was of great help in his search for a place to do his internship. Though Chris is an industrious individual, proud of his skills and determined to advance, he stressed the importance of having the support of friends and family. He said it was important to have people you can depend on. But it was obvious that Chris did not sit around waiting to be taken care of. He described the necessity of organizing his own plan of study at Gallaudet College since they didn't have a structured program in medical technology like the one he wanted. He looked through the catalogues of colleges

*This interview was done by Lucille Festa

that did have such programs to find out what courses they required. And by doing that he met his goal.

Chris talked about the fact that too often deaf students aren't given guidance; no one takes the time to help them learn about occupational choices. They end up in stereotypical jobs like printing, even though the modernization of printing is currently making many such jobs obsolete. But even with the skill Chris has developed through school and his internship, it wasn't easy to get a job. He said that at his present job they liked his credentials so they hired him. At the other interviews it had been obvious they were uneasy about him being deaf. "That's all they saw . . . it was deaf, deaf, deaf." But he's treated normally at work because they see he can do the job. He said if he made a lot of mistakes it would be different. But he doesn't, and so he is respected. There were difficulties at first deciding how to communicate with co-workers. But it was nothing insurmountable. He sees his position as being similar to someone from another country whose English may be limited. Chris likes the diversity of the people in his lab. He said that in his lab there's a good mix of people--"Jewish, Black, Spanish, handicapped, Indian." He enjoys learning about everyone's background. But he stressed that the important thing for all of them was whether they were able to do the work.

I attempted to probe Chris regarding his deafness and how it has affected his life. Chris, who now uses ASL to communicate and signs with his family, was born deaf into a hearing family. He explained his attitude toward his deafness and life in general. Chris continually emphasized the importance of positive thinking. He believes one must work hard, have confidence, and have patience regarding achieving one's goals. He spoke of accepting the frustration that accompanies mistakes, because he is certain he will make mistakes in the future. When a problem occurs in Chris' life he analyzes the problem, attempts to develop a solution, and acts accordingly.

Chris referred several times to the support he received from his family.

Through them he was exposed to the hearing world as well as the world of the deaf. Chris stressed the importance of relating to both in order to make a good adjustment.

He dealt with the problems faced in his personal and professional encounters in a patient manner. He thinks his deafness makes people uneasy and he takes the time to try to put them at ease. He explains to them that he is like everyone else and has the same abilities, with only the one exception.

Chris repeatedly referred to what he called The American Dream. He works hard, sets goals for himself, and is always looking toward the future. He has built a foundation and expects to go upward at a slow but steady pace. Chris spoke of eventually getting a better job, making more money, getting married and raising a family.

During our conversation I noticed that Chris summarized his thoughts with the idea that his life experiences and expectations were much the same as a hearing person's. He was to an extent taking the time to explain to me, as he had done so often with others, that he is "like everyone else."

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Has your experience been similar to Chris' regarding the lack of career guidance?

2. Which people in your life have had a positive influence on your career plans? Negative? Neutral?

3. How have people reacted to your disability in any work settings you've been in?

## THE IDEA CORNER

### Frequently Asked Questions in Job Interviews

- What are your short- and long-range career goals?
- What specific career objectives have you established for yourself in the next five years?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- What do you expect to be earning in three years?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
- Why should we hire you?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company, agency or organization?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- If you were hiring someone for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- What led you to choose your field or major study?
- What college subjects did you like best/least? Why?
- Why should we hire you over someone else (assuming similar credentials)?
- Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
- How do you work under pressure?
- In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
- How would you describe your ideal job?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?

- What do you know about our company?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you might work?
- Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?

Adapted from "Fifty Questions Asked by Employers During the Interview with College Seniors"

## Resume Writing

Here are some suggestions for writing a resume and a cover letter. They were prepared by the Department of Student Personnel of Kingsborough Community College, CUNY. If you are in the process of writing a resume you may want to get a group together to share ideas. We've also included a resume critique form on an earlier page that you can use to evaluate your own and others' resumes.

### TIPS ON RESUME WRITING

1. Have more than one style of resume to highlight your different skills or interests. Keep well supplied in copies so you won't procrastinate sending them out.

2. When preparing your resume, picture it applying to a particular job of interest to you. Tailor the resume to fit that job or field. Use words found in the want ads, descriptions from the Occupational Outlook Handbook and the jargon of that career field. But keep it concise.

3. Be brief and clear--use one or at the most two pages for your resume. Leave out irrelevant details and minor or dubious achievements. You should end up with more words discarded in the wastebasket than recorded in the resume.

4. Never use words you don't understand; avoid being cute or using creative over-kill; don't exaggerate; be able to back up verbally what you write down.

5. Stress positive, constructive aspects; come off as motivated, conscientious and responsible rather than pompous or victimized.

6. Be sure the typing and layout is well done; correct spelling and grammar errors. It is a good idea to let others proofread your resume for clarity and correctness of form.

7. Do not try to copy someone else's resume or copy one out of a book. Find your own words and style. It's best not to pay a firm to write your resume, though it may be worth having it typed.

8. Do not send out carbon copies or messy copies of your resume. Offset printing is your best bet or good, cheap mass production.

9. Keep records of where and to whom you have sent resumes, including dates and addresses. Follow up with phone calls.

10. It is not necessary to identify your work experiences specifically as full-time, part-time, paid or unpaid, or courses as credit or non-credit. However, do not lie if you are asked about it.

11. Avoid abbreviations and/or slang expressions.

12. You do not have to list specific names or addresses of places you have worked if you do not wish them contacted.

13. Be able to inventory your job titles by skills or duties such as: administrative, public speaking, training, teaching, research, editing, managing, etc.

14. In addition to duties and skills, try to cite accomplishments or results of your work.

15. Use active verbs to describe what you have done or, better yet, can do. Examples: analyzing, adjusting, assessing, budgeting, creating, conducting, coordinating, communicating, contacting, chairing, comparing, correcting, coaching, consulting, developing, designing, directing, drafting, establishing, editing, evaluating, generating, investigating, interviewing, instructing, inspecting, introducing, maintaining, proposing, planning, negotiating, representing, reviewing, recording, managing, organizing, recommending, selling, selecting, supervising, screening, tabulating, etc.

## TIPS ON WRITING COVER LETTERS

1. Be concise--no more than one page, even one or two paragraphs can suffice.

2. Type neatly; correct spelling and grammar; use standard, white 8½ x 11 paper; be aware of layout.

3. Have someone proofread your letter for correctness and clarity.

4. Never send a resume without a cover letter.

5. Focus your opening sentences to indicate why you are writing, with a reference to the enclosed resume.

6. If you are answering an ad, adapt your tone, style, and vocabulary to those of the ad. (Quote from the ad.)

7. Mention your job goal or career aspirations, particularly if you have not done so in the resume.

8. Mention, specifically if possible, what you might contribute to the prospective employer.

9. Indicate that you know something about their organization, goals or activities.

10. Address your cover letter to a specific person by name. If in doubt, send it to the Vice President or Project Director. (Call ahead for individual names.)

11. Touch on a few relevant points from your resume, particularly in terms of results you have produced or problems you have solved.

12. Sound interested but not desperate.

13. Close with a request for an interview at their convenience.

14. Make a follow-up phone call if you have not had a response within a week.

15. Don't apologize for yourself or your letter.

16. If you are answering an ad with a box number and no name or title, use the box number as the inside address, and a salutation such as: To Whom It May Concern, or Dear Employer. It is also acceptable to omit a salutation in this case.

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

In a way, we have been working our way up to this chapter through the eight chapters that precede it. The "important interviews" are the gateways to next steps in our lives. We have emphasized the gateways to jobs and to career progress, certainly one of the most vital parts of most people's lives. We hope that you are finding that the skills you have been building up during these weeks now fall into place as important pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. Also, putting the pieces all together--the skills in listening, expressing ideas and feelings, and all the rest--will now help you to see where you may need to go back and strengthen some of those specific skills. So it's a lifelong process you've started; continued growth is the reward.

# CHAPTER TEN
# HANDLING WORK SITUATIONS

The last time you went into a bookstore you may have noticed the many books written about how to succeed at work. Seeing titles like Dressing for Success and How to Win Your Boss's Love, Approval . . . and Job you may begin to think your every move has to be as carefully calculated as a soldier's in war. If you looked at the books, you'd find as many different opinions on how to handle work situations as there are books. We're not going to try to fill you up with our own opinions. But we do believe there are certain steps you can take to make entering a new job easier.

IN THIS CHAPTER we'll cover protecting yourself as a worker, getting to know your co-workers, dealing with authority, and familiarizing yourself with the work environment.

## TO GET STARTED

Imagine that a younger brother or sister is going to high school. They talk to you about some of the things they are worried about like appearing old enough, getting along with the other students, being able to handle the assignments, and choosing the right classes. As they talk, you remember how you had felt when starting high school and you try to offer some suggestions.

***Have two students act out the scene. Afterwards you can add your own thoughts on what you'd say to a younger brother or sister.

*** By now you've spent a good number of years being a student. So that's an occupation you probably know quite a bit about. How do you think working will be similar to being a student? In small groups make a list of how it will be similar, and how it will be different. Then join the big group. Make two headings on the chalkboard: how work is similar to school, and how it's different. Then as each group reads its lists write them on the board under the heading where each belongs. You may want to take a few minutes to discuss each other's opinions. Are there a lot of repeated comments from the groups? How many people from your group have already worked? How many have never worked?

***Everybody feels some concern when thinking about starting a new job. Make two lists: concerns that almost everyone might feel and special concerns that people with disabilities might feel more than non-disabled people.

***What kind of skills have you developed as a student that could help you at work? On the board list the skills that are mentioned by people in the class under headings like "writing," "research," "interviewing," and "meeting deadlines."

## TO IMPROVE

Your first weeks on a new job are very important. That old saying about the first impression being a lasting impression is really true. Usually the impression you make in the beginning determines how your supervisor and co-workers will treat you in the future. You could just say there's nothing I can do, whatever happens in the first few weeks happens. But rather than feeling fatalistic you can take some important positive steps.

One of the first things you can do is accept your feelings. You may be worried about doing the work or making mistakes, or you may think you'll have trouble remembering people's names or getting along with your co-workers. It's important to be aware of your feelings. You may want to talk about them with a friend or a counselor. Some concerns you have can be handled before you start your job. For instance, you may be worried about getting to work on time. A practice run can show you how much time you'll need to get ready and get to work. It's a practical thing to do. But it also shows that yes, you can do it. Of course there's no way you can gather your future workers in your living room and practice dealing with them. But knowing that everyone feels nervous and uncertain when starting new projects may help. Think how you felt when starting high school. Remind yourself that you handled that and other difficult situations, and so you can handle this. You may want to ask your counselor for some stress reducing exercise like deep breathing or situation rehearsing. Then--the best way to take your mind off yourself--get to work.

The first week you'll probably have so many new procedures and projects described to you that you'll wonder if you aren't in over your head. Some of this new information (like office policies and benefit packages) may be written down so you don't have to worry about remembering them. But the other things may seem to be whizzing past you. Keep reminding yourself you were hired because your employer thought you could do the job. Remember to use both verbal and non-verbal skills discussed in this book to demonstrate your competence. Specifically, you may want to review with your supervisor your responsibilities or the operation of any special equipment. Asking about upcoming deadlines or paperwork that's required will help you set up priorities as well as show your interest. During your first weeks you may want to ask your supervisor for feedback. By occasionally doing this you can not only recognize and correct mistakes but also show your interest in doing a first-rate job.

Getting to know your co-workers is important in a new job. You may want to suggest eating lunch together, or you could join a group at coffee break. You'll be learning about each other's education, past work experiences, and hobbies. If you have a job modification because of your disability or use any special equipment, now is a good time to tell your co-workers about it. You'll avoid any tensions that could develop from their discomfort or confusion.

Another thing you'll want to become familiar with when you start a new job is the personnel policies and procedures. This includes information about time sheets, insurance benefits, and scheduling vacations as well as everyday policies like when you're expected to come in, leave for lunch and take coffee breaks. Sometimes your supervisor or the office manager will explain these things to you. In large firms orientation groups are often scheduled. If no one mentions this to you it would be a good idea to ask your supervisor when would be a good time to fill out the personnel forms. While filling out the tax, insurance, and background information forms you may think of things you need to know like where you get your work I.D. card, and what the attitude is toward receiving personal calls.

Another concern you may have in starting a new job is dealing with your supervisor. There are some similarities between the supervisor/employee relationship and the one between professor and student. Just as there are some professors you're more at ease with, so will there be certain supervisory styles you'll prefer. Though there are whole books about this we'd like to describe briefly three important situations that may come up. Following instructions is an important part of being a worker. Although clear instructions may have been given, problems may come up when you actually start the assignment. Asking

specific questions at the right time could prevent problems in the future. A second situation is telling the difference between a demand and a request. All supervisors can demand workers to do tasks outlined in the job specification. But a demand to run errands for your supervisor, assume additional responsibilities, or work overtime are things that you may have the right to question or opt not to do. The third situation that may happen is handling a supervisor's negative feedback. You may want to review the chapter on this to remind yourself that even though the response is coming from your boss you can still evaluate the comments and question any that you think are inaccurate or unfair.

It's important in beginning a job to learn about your firm's organizational structure. As you learn about the other departments and positions, you'll also learn the best way to do things like present an idea for a new project or process a form. And as you get more experience you'll develop your own list of people who can help you.

And lastly you'll also feel more comfortable if you're familiar with the work environment. If your supervisor isn't able to help you, you can turn to a co-worker for tips on machines, supplies, and the organization's facilities. A casual tour during lunch could let you know where the cafeteria, the mailroom, or a nurse's station is.

## NOW TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

***Make a list of questions that you'd like answered the first week of work. Design a role play in which the supervisor is distracted and wants to end the discussion as quickly as possible. How would you handle it?

***Have two more volunteers act out a situation where a co-worker is overly helpful to a new employee.

***Here are some situations with a supervisor. In a small group discuss ways of handling them. Choose a few situations to try acting out:

Your supervisor asked you to process several forms which must be completed before the day's end. You are unsure, however, how these forms should be filled out. Your supervisor is at an all day conference.

Your supervisor asks you to shop for decorations for an office party during your lunch hour.

Your supervisor asks you to get him/her coffee.

Although you understood your supervisor's instructions at the time, you can't remember how to operate a complex machine.

You have a feeling that your supervisor is reluctant to put demands on you because of your disability. The supervisor seems to be there at all times, hovering over you even when you don't need it.

You think that your supervisor has been overly harsh with you. During lunch you meet your supervisor's supervisor. This person, who is a family friend, asks how you are enjoying your new job.

## DURING THE WEEK

1. Make a list of ten things you'd want to know about a new job. Then under it write down where you'd find that information--the personnel department, your supervisor, a co-worker or someone else.

2. What's your major concern about starting a new job? Find a partner. Share your concerns. Then help each other by brainstorming possible ways of handling it. When the group meets again you can tell your concern and two of the solutions you came up with. They may have ideas of their own to add.

## STUDENTS HAVE TOLD US

- The thing I learned from a summer job was to be careful about all the office cliques. You can't really stay out of it or everybody thinks you're a snob. But I should have been more careful in the beginning. Work isn't like school where you can tell a friend something and expect them not to talk about you.

- o If you're working part-time, you can't expect your supervisor to change your schedule around to fit your class schedule. You can't really make any demands. Being a part-timer means you're the bottom of the barrel.

- o Going back to work after raising my family was very scary to me. I thought everyone else was in on brilliant secrets just because they had been working. But then I saw that I had most of the skills that supervisors were looking for. And I think young people who have always been students have many of them, too. If you've learned to meet deadlines, organize your time, and been responsible, you have the skills regardless of where you learned them.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you think you will have to act more guarded at work in the way you deal with people than you do at school? Have you found that there are cliques at school and that sometimes they present a problem for you?

2. Do you expect that some of these relationship problems will be different on a full time job from the way they are on part-time or summer jobs?

**HOW THEY DID IT**

## THE WORKER OF THE FUTURE ?

Many companies are having computer terminals installed in employees' homes. Other companies are allowing their analysts and programmers to check out portable terminals at night or over the weekend. It's really too early to know if this trend will grow. But it's clearly a desirable work setting for many people, among them disabled people who are homebound.

Of course there's nothing new about working at home. However, the number of people who do work at home is at present only around 4% of the labor force. Around one-third of those are farmers, and many of the rest are in business for themselves. But now, with increasingly sophisticated technology, the choice of working at home is open to a lot more people in a diversity of occupations. This is a choice increasingly available for those working for large corporations.

The whole trend of telecommunications is illustrated by Queensborough Community College in Bayside, New York. They have an external education program for individuals who are homebound. A conference telephone system allows students at home to join in class discussion, ask questions of the instructor, and become involved in the give and take of the classroom atmosphere. In some courses additional equipment such as computer terminals and lab materials equipment are supplied. Majors are available in accounting, secretarial sciences, data processing, liberal arts and sciences, and administration.

In the work world this creative use of technology is illustrated by corporations such as Lift, Inc. They're a nonprofit organization in the Chicago area that trains disabled people in the skills they need to perform programming services from their homes. Through this training program companies pay Lift for its employees' services, and Lift in turn pays its programmers.

One of Lift's employees has a job with a bank. He gets his assignments by telephone or by electronic mail to the terminal in his home. The only concern his supervisor has is how to make up for the natural on-the-job training that occurs when beginners work with more experienced employees. He says other employees often ask the programmer what the person working at home is doing. It's his opinion that they think it would be nice to work at home themselves and are glad their company is exploring the possibility.

These kinds of positions are ideal for people wanting to avoid a long commute, needing to be at home with children, or simply wanting time to pursue their education or a second profession. It's not the job for everyone. But the possibilities available to all of us through technology shouldn't be ignored. A recent issue of the The Futurist stated that "As prices have dropped and capabilities have increased, microelectronic devices are becoming an everyday part of many people's lives. Products such as word processors, digital watches, robots, and optical scanning cash registers are now found in offices, stores, schools, factories and homes. The technology is still young, and its potential for growth is staggering. Microcomputers and robots are two relatively new products that are already causing across-the-board impacts." (The Futurist, 8/81)

If this trend continues to grow, we may soon find ourselves in a world that doesn't punish people for the things they can't do. Instead our deficits will be replaced by machinery and we will be free to supply the skills that only humans have. One step in this direction is not to fire people when they are no longer able to go to a worksite. Instead the worksite will go to them.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Could you see yourself working at home? What kind of work would you be interested in doing?

2. Do you know anybody who would be better off working at home? What would be the reasons?

3. What do you see as the advantages of working at home? The disadvantages?

## JOBS IN THE 1980's

Choosing a career, like every other major decision, has two sides. You should allow yourself to dream--think about your needs, interests, and talents. Then you need to find out what needs exist in the world around you. You can do this by talking to your counselor, or looking at publications like the Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook. Then comes the hard part when you try to balance out your ideal with the actual possiblities. Knowing that there are going to be seven million openings for carpenter ant exterminators should not make you decide on that profession. But it is helpful to get an idea about the job possibilities in your area of interest.

From reading the interviews you probably saw that many people ended up in jobs they hadn't imagined while in college. Often people make career changes when they discover a new interest or are offered a new position. So you don't have to feel you're committing yourself for life to one job and one job only. And one more point to remember is that it is sometimes possible to take a job and then modify it so it fits your abilities better.

If you aren't familiar with the Occupational Outlook Handbook, it's a book you may want to look at. Jobs are described and you're given an idea of the kind of setting you'd be working in, the education and training you'll need, and the possibilities for employment.

Here are some statistics. You should not base a decision on them. But you can use them as yet another source of information. The Department of Labor has

predicted that the following will be the ten fastest growing occupational areas. The job openings in these areas are expected to rise 50 percent or more nationally by 1985:

| Career areas | Minimum expected increases |
|---|---|
| Industrial machinery mechanics | 160,000 |
| Emergency medical technicians | 143,500 |
| Air conditioning, refrigeration, heating mechanics | 87,500 |
| Health service administrators | 80,000 |
| Sewer plant operators | 50,000 |
| Computer service technicians | 25,000 |
| Insulation workers | 15,000 |
| Dental hygienists | 13,000 |
| Marketing researchers | 12,500 |
| Occupational therapists | 5,300 |

Here are an additional twenty-five areas where job growth is expected by 1985:

| | |
|---|---|
| Secretaries and Stenographers | 875,000 |
| Local truck drivers | 400,000 |
| Cooks and Chefs | 266,250 |
| Registered nurses | 240,000 |
| Machinists | 171,900 |
| Welders | 165,000 |

| Career areas (continued) | Minimum expected increases |
|---|---|
| Teachers' aides | 160,000 |
| Carpenters | 151,500 |
| Construction machinery operators | 150,000 |
| Engineers | 146,250 |
| Retail trade sales | 135,000 |
| Accountants | 129,750 |
| Police officers | 125,000 |
| Real estate agents | 112,500 |
| Construction laborers | 107,250 |
| Auto mechanics | 105,000 |
| Lawyers | 99,000 |
| Bookkeepers | 85,000 |
| Computer operators | 84,750 |
| Personnel workers | 83,750 |
| Social workers | 82,500 |
| Beauticians | 82,100 |
| Drafters | 80,000 |
| Bank officers | 75,000 |
| Insurance agents | 69,750 |

## AT THE END OF THIS CHAPTER AND OF THE BOOK

If you have worked through all or most of the ten chapters in this workbook, we've traveled a long way together. If you tried many of the exercises with your group and some of those suggested for between-sessions, you have probably increased your skills noticeably. Perhaps your family or friends have remarked on some changes in the way you handle yourself (feedback!). If they haven't, ask them; this may make them more careful observers, so you'll have the benefit of their continuing feedback long after this class has ended.

Maybe that last point is the most important one we'd like to leave with you--than what counts most is not the growth you've made during this course, or in fact anytime in the past. What counts most, we think, is growing rather than growth. It's developing new habits and new attitudes and constantly asking yourself: What new things am I going to learn this year? What new skills am I going to acquire? That's a good lifetime habit; it can help keep you alive and functioning for the rest of your life.